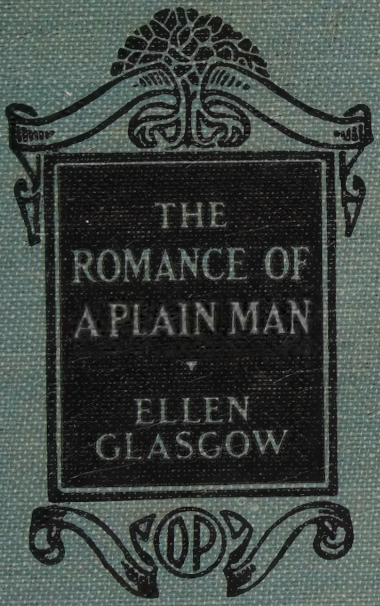
THE
ROMANCE OF
A PLAIN MAN
ELLEN
GLASGOW

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To Mother
from
Winnie
Christmas 1929

THE ROMANCE OF A PLAIN MAN

BOOKS BY ELLEN GLASGOW

BARREN GROUND
LIFE AND GABRIELLA
ONE MAN IN HIS TIME
PHASES OF AN INFERIOR PLANET
THE ANCIENT LAW
THE BATTLE-GROUND
THE BUILDERS
THE DELIVERANCE
THE DESCENDANT
THE FREEMAN AND OTHER POEMS
THE ROMANCE OF A PLAIN MAN
THE SHADOWY THIRD AND OTHER STORIES
THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE
THE WHEEL OF LIFE
VIRGINIA

The Romance of a Plain Man

BY

ELLEN GLASGOW

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY
HUGH WALPOLE

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1926

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INTRODUCTION

I AM delighted to write about any of Glasgow's work and admire it for all kinds of reasons but I think she is especially important because she is a link between the older generation and the new. She has never broken from the real tradition of the English novel and out of that tradition she has helped to build up the true American novel. Her novels are American absolutely but she cares for the creation of character, for the leisurely construction of a whole world of people and places with a true philosophy behind them. I admire her because she has never gone in for short cuts, there's a fine *thickness* behind her books so that when you have finished one of them you have to extricate yourself as you do when you have been staying for a long time with friends and have learnt to share their joys and surprises and troubles. I am sure that this business of creating a world is the finest thing a novelist can do but to do it you have to be a born creator, you have to know your country absolutely. If I think of "The Builders" or "Virginia" or "Phases of an Inferior Planet" I think of them not as detached books but as fragments of the history of a fascinating country, the Glasgow country. Of course she writes beautifully, is a real poet and has drama and humour at her command but this business of creating a world is, I am sure, her chief gift. In these days she shares it with Hergesheimer and Cabell in America, Galsworthy and Bennett over here.

HUGH WALPOLE.

THE ROMANCE OF A PLAIN MAN

THE ROMANCE OF A PLAIN MAN

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH I APPEAR WITH FEW PRETENSIONS

As the storm broke and a shower of hail rattled like a handful of pebbles against our little window, I choked back a sob and edged my small green-painted stool a trifle nearer the hearth. On the opposite side of the wire fender, my father kicked off his wet boots, stretched his feet, in grey yarn stockings, out on the rag carpet in front of the fire, and reached for his pipe which he had laid, still smoking, on the floor under his chair.

"It's as true as the Bible, Benjy," he said, "that on the day you were born yo' brother President traded off my huntin' breeches for a yaller pup."

My knuckles went to my eyes, while the smart of my mother's slap faded from the cheek I had turned to the fire.

"What's become o' th' p-p-up-p?" I demanded, as I stared up at him with my mouth held half open in readiness to break out again.

"Dead," responded my father solemnly, and I wept aloud.

It was an October evening in my childhood, and so vivid has my later memory of it become that I can still see the sheets of water that rolled from the lead pipe on our roof, and can still hear the splash! splash!

with which they fell into the gutter below. For three days the clouds had hung in a grey curtain over the city, and at dawn a high wind, blowing up from the river, had driven the dead leaves from the churchyard like flocks of startled swallows into our little street. Since morning I had watched them across my mother's "prize" red geranium upon our window-sill—now whipped into deep swirls and eddies over the sunken brick pavement, now rising in sighing swarms against the closed doors of the houses, now soaring aloft until they flew almost as high as the living swallows in the belfry of old Saint John's. Then as the dusk fell, and the street lamps glimmered like blurred stars through the rain, I drew back into our little sitting-room, which glowed bright as an ember against the fierce weather outside.

Half an hour earlier my father had come up from the marble yard, where he spent his days cutting lambs and doves and elaborate ivy wreaths in stone, and the smell from his great rubber coat, which hung drying before the kitchen stove, floated with the aroma of coffee through the half-open door. When I closed an eye and peeped through the crack, I could see my mother's tall shadow, shifting, not flitting, on the whitewashed wall of the kitchen, as she passed back and forth from the stove to the wooden cradle in which my little sister Jessy lay asleep, with the head of her rag doll in her mouth.

Outside the splash! splash! of the rain still sounded on the brick pavement, and as I glanced through the window, I saw an old blind negro beggar groping under the street lamp at the corner. The muffled beat of his stick in the drenched leaves passed our doorstep, and

I heard it grow gradually fainter as he turned in the direction of the negro hovels that bordered our end of the town. Across the street, and on either side of us, there were rows of small boxlike frame houses built with narrow door-ways, which opened from the sidewalk into funny little kitchens, where women, in soiled calico dresses, appeared to iron all day long. It was the poorer quarter of what is known in Richmond as "Church Hill," a portion of the city which had been left behind in the earlier fashionable progress westward. Between us and modern Richmond there were several high hills, up which the poor dripping horses panted on summer days, a railroad station, and a broad slum-like bottom vaguely described as the "Old Market." Our prosperity, with our traditions, had crumbled around us, yet there were still left the ancient church, with its shady graveyard, and an imposing mansion or two inherited from the forgotten splendour of former days. The other Richmond — that "up-town" I heard sometimes mentioned — I had never seen, for my early horizon was bounded by the green hill, by the crawling salmon-coloured James River at its foot, and by the quaint white belfry of the parish of old St. John's. Beneath that belfry I had made miniature graves on summer afternoons, and as I sat now opposite to my father, with the bright fire between us, the memory of those crumbling vaults made me hug myself in the warmth, while I edged nearer the great black kettle singing before the flames.

"Pa," I asked presently, with an effort to resume the conversation along cheerful lines, "was it a he or a she pup?"

My father turned his bright blue eyes from the fire, while his hand wandered, with an habitual gesture, to his coarse straw-coloured hair which stood, like mine, straight up from the forehead.

"Wall, I'll be blessed if I can recollect, Benjy," he replied, and added after a moment, in which I knew that his slow wits were working over a fresh attempt at distraction, "but speaking of dawgs, it wouldn't surprise me if yo' ma was to let you have a b'iled egg for yo' supper."

Again the storm was averted. He was so handsome, so soft, so eager to make everybody happy, that although he did not deceive even my infant mind for a minute, I felt obliged by sheer force of sympathy to step into the amiable snare he laid.

"Hard or soft?" I demanded.

"Now that's a matter of ch'ice, ain't it?" he rejoined, wrinkling his forehead as if awed by the gravity of the decision; "but bein' a plain man with a taste for solids, I'd say 'hard' every time."

"Hard, ma," I repeated gravely through the crack of the door to the shifting shape on the kitchen wall. Then, while he stooped over in the firelight to prod fresh tobacco into his pipe, I began again my insatiable quest for knowledge which had brought me punishment at the hand of my mother an hour before.

"Pa, who named me?"

"Yo' ma."

"Did ma name you, too?"

He shook his head, doubtfully, not negatively. Above his short growth of beard his cheeks had warmed

to a clear pink, and his foolish blue eyes were as soft as the eyes of a baby.

"Wall, I can't say she did that — exactly."

"Then who did name you?"

"I don't recollect. My ma, I reckon."

"Did ma name me Ben Starr, or just Ben?"

"Just Ben. You were born Starr."

"Was she born Starr, too?"

"Good Lord, no, she was born Savage."

"Then why warn't I born Savage?"

"Because she married me an' I was born Starr."

I gave it up with a sigh. "Who had the most to do with my comin' here, God or ma?" I asked after a minute.

My father hesitated as if afraid of committing himself to an heretical utterance. "I ain't so sure," he replied at last, and added immediately in a louder tone, "Yo' ma, I s'pose."

"Then why don't I say my prayers to ma instead of to God?"

"I wouldn't begin to worry over that at my age, if I were you," replied my father, with angelic patience, "secin' as it's near supper time an' the kettle's a-bilin'."

"But I want to know, pa, why it was that I came to be named just Ben?"

"To be named just Ben?" he repeated slowly, as if the fact had been brought for the first time to his attention. "Wall, I reckon 'twas because we'd had considerable trouble over the namin' of the first, which was yo' brother President. That bein' the turn of the man of the family, I calculated that as a plain American citizen, I couldn't do better than show I hadn't

any ill feelin' agin the Government. I don't recollect just what the name of the gentleman at the head of the Nation was, seein' 'twas goin' on sixteen years ago, but I'd made up my mind to call the infant in the cradle arter him, if he'd ever answered my letter — which he never did. It was then yo' ma an' I had words because she didn't want a child of hers named arter such a bad-mannered, stuck-up, ornary sort, President or no President. She raised a terrible squall, but I held out against her," he went on, dropping his voice, "an' I stood up for it that as long as 'twas the office an' not the man I was complimentin', I'd name him arter the office, which I did on the spot. When 'twas over an' done the notion got into my head an' kind of tickled me, an' when you came at last, arter the four others in between, that died befo' they took breath, I was a'ready to name you 'Governor' if yo' ma had been agreeable. But 'twas her turn, so she called you arter her Uncle Benjamin —"

"What's become o' Uncle Benjamin?" I interrupted.

"Dead," responded my father, and for the third time I wept.

"I declar' that child's been goin' on like that for the last hour," remarked my mother, appearing upon the threshold. "Thar, thar, Benjy boy, stop cryin' an' I'll let you go to old Mr. Cudlip's burial to-morrow."

"May I go, too, ma?" enquired President, who had come in with a lighted lamp in his hand. He was a big, heavy, overgrown boy, and his head was already on a level with his father's.

"Not if I know it," responded my mother tartly, for her temper was rising and she looked tired and

anxious. "I'll take Benjy along because he can crowd in an' nobody'll mind."

She moved a step nearer while her shadow loomed to gigantic proportions on the whitewashed wall. Her thin brown hair, partially streaked with grey, was brushed closely over her scalp, and this gave her profile an angularity that became positively grotesque in the shape behind her. Across her forehead there were three deep frowning wrinkles, which did not disappear even when she smiled, and her sad, flint-coloured eyes held a perplexed and anxious look, as if she were trying always to remember something which was very important and which she had half forgotten. I had never seen her, except when she went to funerals, dressed otherwise than in a faded grey calico with a faded grey shawl crossed tightly over her bosom and drawn to the back of her waist, where it was secured by a safety pin of an enormous size. Beside her my father looked so young and so amiable that I had a confused impression that he had shrunk to my own age and importance. Then my mother retreated into the kitchen and he resumed immediately his natural proportions. After thirty years, when I think now of that ugly little room, with its painted pine furniture, with its coloured glass vases, filled with dried cat-tails, upon the mantelpiece, with its crude red and yellow print of a miniature David attacking a colossal Goliath, with its narrow window-panes, where beyond the "prize" red geranium the wind drove the fallen leaves over the brick pavement, with its staring whitewashed walls, and its hideous rag carpet — when I think of these vulgar details it is to find that they are softened in my memory by a

sense of peace, of shelter, and of warm firelight shadows.

My mother had just laid the supper table, over which I had watched her smooth the clean red and white cloth with her twisted fingers; President was proudly holding aloft a savoury dish of broiled herrings, and my father had pinned on my bib and drawn back the green-painted chair in which I sat for my meals — when a hurried knock at the door arrested each one of us in his separate attitude as if he had been instantly petrified by the sound.

There was a second's pause, and then before my father could reach it, the door opened and shut violently, and a woman, in a dripping cloak, holding a little girl by the hand, came from the storm outside, and ran straight to the fire, where she stood shaking the child's wet clothes before the flames. As the light fell over them, I saw that the woman was young and delicate and richly dressed, with a quantity of pale brown hair which the rain and wind had beaten flat against her small frightened face. At the time she was doubtless an unusually pretty creature to a grown-up pair of eyes, but my gaze, burning with curiosity, passed quickly over her to rest upon the little girl, who possessed for me the attraction of my own age and size. She wore red shoes, I saw at my first glance, and a white cloak, which I took to be of fur, though it was probably made of some soft, fuzzy cloth I had never seen. There was a white cap on her head, held by an elastic band under her square little chin, and about her shoulders her hair lay in a profuse, drenched mass of brown, which reminded me in the firelight of the

colour of wet November leaves. She was soaked through, and yet as she stood there, with her teeth chattering in the warmth, I was struck by the courage, almost the defiance, with which she returned my gaze. Baby that she was, I felt that she would scorn to cry while my glance was upon her, though there were fresh tear marks on her flushed cheeks, and around her solemn grey eyes that were made more luminous by her broad, heavily arched black eyebrows, which gave her an intense and questioning look. The memory of this look, which was strange in so young a child, remained with me after the colour of her hair and every charming feature in her face were forgotten. Years afterwards I think I could have recognised her in a crowded street by the mingling of light with darkness, of intense black with clear grey, in her sparkling glance.

"I followed the wrong turn," said the pale little woman, breathing hard with a pitiable, frightened sound, while my mother took her dripping cloak from her shoulders, "and I could not keep on because of the rain which came up so heavily. If I could only reach the foot of the hill I might find a carriage to take me up-town."

My father had sprung forward as she entered, and was vigorously stirring the fire, which blazed and crackled merrily in the open grate. She accepted thankfully my mother's efforts to relieve her of her wet wraps, but the little girl drew back haughtily when she was approached, and refused obstinately to slip out of her cloak, from which the water ran in streams to the floor.

"I don't like it here, mamma, it is a common place,"

she said, in a clear childish voice, and though I hardly grasped the meaning of her words, her tone brought to me for the first time a feeling of shame for my humble surroundings.

"Hush, Sally," replied her mother, "you must dry yourself. These people are very kind."

"But I thought we were going to grandmama's?"

"Grandmama lives up-town, and we are going as soon as the storm has blown over. There, be a good girl and let the little boy take your wet cap."

"I don't want him to take my cap. He is a common boy."

In spite of the fact that she seemed to me to be the most disagreeable little girl I had ever met, the word she had used was lodged unalterably in my memory. In that puzzled instant, I think, began my struggle to rise out of the class in which I belonged by birth; and I remember that I repeated the word "common" in a whisper to myself, while I resolved that I would learn its meaning in order that I might cease to be the unknown thing that it implied.

My mother, who had gone into the kitchen with the dripping cloak in her arms, returned a moment later with a cup of steaming coffee in one hand and a mug of hot milk in the other.

"It's a mercy if you haven't caught your death with an inner chill," she observed in a brisk, kindly tone. "'Twas the way old Mr. Cudlip, whose funeral I'm going to to-morrow, came to his end, and he was as hale, red-faced a body as you ever laid eyes on."

The woman received the cup gratefully, and I could see her poor thin hands tremble as she raised it to her lips.

"Drink the warm milk, dear," she said pleadingly to the disagreeable little girl, who shook her head and drew back with a stiff childish gesture.

"I'm not hungry, thank you," she replied to my mother in her sweet, clear treble. To all further entreaties she returned the same answer, standing there a haughty, though drenched and battered infant, in her soiled white cloak and her red shoes, holding her mop of a muff tightly in both hands.

"I'm not hungry, thank you," she repeated, adding presently in a manner of chill politeness, "give it to the boy."

But the boy was not hungry either, and when my mother, finally taking her at her word, turned, in exasperation, and offered the mug to me, I declined it, also, and stood nervously shifting from one foot to the other, while my hands caught and twisted the fringe of the table-cloth at my back. The big grey eyes of the little girl looked straight into mine, but there was no hint in them that she was aware of my existence. Though her teeth were chattering, and she knew I heard them, she did not relax for an instant from her scornful attitude.

"We were just about to take a mouthful of supper, mum, an' we'd be proud if you an' the little gal would jine us," remarked my father, with an eager hospitality.

"I thank you," replied the woman in her pretty, grateful manner, "but the coffee has restored my strength, and if you will direct me to the hill, I shall be quite able to go on again."

A step passed close to the door on the pavement outside, and I saw her start and clutch the child to her

bosom with trembling hands. As she stood there in her shaking terror, I remembered a white kitten I had once seen chased by boys into the area of a deserted house.

"If — if any one should come to enquire after me, will you be so good as to say nothing of my having been here?" she asked.

"To be sure I will, with all the pleasure in life," responded my father, who, it was evident even to me, had become a victim to her distressed loveliness.

Emboldened by the effusive politeness of my parent, I went up to the little girl and shyly offered her a blossom from my mother's geranium upon the window-sill. A scrap of a hand, as cold as ice when it touched mine, closed over the stem of the flower, and without looking at me, she stood, very erect, with the scarlet geranium grasped stiffly between her fingers.

"I'll take you to the bottom of the hill myself," protested my father, "but I wish you could persuade yourself to try a bite of food befo' you set out in the rain."

"It is important that I should lose no time," answered the woman, drawing her breath quickly through her small white teeth, "but I fear that I am taking you away from your supper?"

"Not at all, you will not deprive me in the least," stammered my father, blushing up to his ears, while his straight flaxen hair appeared literally to rise with embarrassment. "I — I — the fact is I'm not an eater, mum."

For an instant, remembering the story of Ananias I had heard in Sunday-school, I looked round in terror,

half expecting to hear the dreadful feet of the young men on the pavement. But he passed scathless for the hour at least, and our visitor had turned to receive her half-dried cloak from my mother's hands, when her face changed suddenly to a more deadly pallor, and seizing the little girl by the shoulder, she fled, like a small frightened animal, across the threshold into the kitchen.

My father's hand had barely reached the knob of the street door, when it opened and a man in a rubber coat entered, and stopped short in the centre of the room, where he stood blinking rapidly in the lamplight. I heard the rain drip with a soft pattering sound from his coat to the floor, and when he wheeled about, after an instant in which his glance searched the room, I saw that his face was flushed and his eyes swimming and bloodshot. There was in his look, as I remember it now, something of the inflamed yet bridled cruelty of a bird of prey.

"Have you noticed a lady with a little girl go by?" he enquired.

At his question my father fell back a step or two until he stood squarely planted before the door into the kitchen. Though he was a big man, he was not so big as the other, who towered above the dried cat-tails in a china vase on the mantelpiece.

"Are you sure they did not pass here?" asked the stranger, and as he turned his head the dried pollen was loosened from the cat-tails and drifted in an ashen dust to the hearth.

"No, I'll stake my word on that. They ain't passed here yet," replied my father.

With an angry gesture the other shook his rubber coat over our bright little carpet, and passed out again, slamming the door violently behind him. Running to the window, I lifted the green shade, and watched his big black figure splashing recklessly through the heavy puddles under the faint yellowish glimmer of the street lamp at the corner. The light flickered feebly on his rubber coat and appeared to go out in the streams of water that fell from his shoulders.

When I looked round I saw that the woman had come back into the room, still grasping the little girl by the hand.

"No, no, I must go at once. It is necessary that I should go at once," she repeated breathlessly, looking up in a dazed way into my mother's face.

"If you must you must, an' what ain't my business ain't," replied my mother a trifle sharply, while she wrapped a grey woollen comforter of her own closely over the head and shoulders of the little girl, "but if you'd take my advice, which you won't, you'd turn this minute an' walk straight back home to yo' husband."

But the woman only shook her head with its drenched mass of soft brown hair.

"We must go, Sally, mustn't we?" she said to the child.

"Yes, we must go, mamma," answered the little girl, still grasping the stem of the red geranium between her fingers.

"That bein' the case, I'll get into my coat with all the pleasure in life an' see you safe," remarked my father, with a manner that impressed me as little short of the magnificent.

"But I hate to take you away from home on such a terrible night."

"Oh, don't mention the weather," responded my gallant parent, while he struggled into his rubber shoes; and he added quite handsomely, after a flourish which appeared to set the elements at defiance, "arter all, weather is only weather, mum."

As nobody, not even my mother, was found to challenge the truth of this statement, the child was warmly wrapped up in an old blanket shawl, and my father lifted her in his arms, while the three set out under a big cotton umbrella for the brow of the hill. President and I peered after them from the window, screening our eyes with our hollowed palms, and flattening our noses against the icy panes; but in spite of our efforts we could only discern dimly the shape of the umbrella rising like a miniature black mountain out of the white blur of the fog. The long empty street with the wind-drifts of dead leaves, the pale glimmer of the solitary light at the far corner, the steady splash! splash! of the rain as it fell on the brick pavement, the bitter draught that blew in over the shivering geranium upon the sill — all these brought a lump to my throat, and I turned back quickly into our cheerful little room, where my untasted supper awaited me.

CHAPTER II

THE ENCHANTED GARDEN

THE funeral was not until nine o'clock, but at seven my mother served us a cold breakfast in order, as she said, that she might get the dishes washed and the house tidied before we started. Gathering about the bare table, we ate our dismal meal in a depressed silence, while she bustled back and forth from the kitchen in her holiday attire, which consisted of a stiff black bombazine dress and the long rustling crape veil she had first put on at the death of her uncle Benjamin, some twenty years before. As her only outings were those occasioned by the deaths of her neighbours, I suppose her costume was quite as appropriate as it seemed to my childish eyes. Certainly, as she appeared before me in her hard, shiny, very full bombazine skirt and attenuated bodice, I regarded her with a reverence which her everyday calico had never inspired.

"I ain't et a mouthful an' I doubt if I'll have time to befo' we start," she was saying in an irritable voice, as I settled into my bib and my chair. "Anybody might have thought I'd be allowed to attend a funeral in peace, but I shan't be, — no, not even when it comes to my own."

"Thar's plenty of time yet, Susan," returned my father cheerfully, while he sawed at the cold corn-

bread on the table. "You've got a good hour an' mo' befo' you."

"An' the things to wash up an' the house to tidy in my veil and bonnet. Thar ain't many women, I reckon, that would wash up china in a crape veil, but I've done it befo' an' I'm used to it."

"Why don't you lay off yo' black things till you're through?"

His suggestion was made innocently enough, but it appeared, as he uttered it, to be the one thing needed to sharpen the edge of my mother's temper. The three frowning lines deepened across her forehead, and she stared straight before her with her perplexed and anxious look under her rustling crape.

"Yes, I'll take 'em off an' lay 'em away an' git back to work," she rejoined. "It did seem as if I might have taken a holiday at a time like this — my next do' neighbour, too, an' I'd al'ays promised him I'd see him laid safe in the earth. But, no, I can't do it. I'll go take off my veil an' bonnet an' stay at home."

Before this attack my father grew so depressed that I half expected to see tears fall into his cup of coffee, as they had into mine. His handsome gayety dropped from him, and he looked as downcast as was possible for a face composed of so many flagrantly cheerful features.

"I declar, Susan, I wa'nt thinkin' of that," he returned apologetically, "it just seemed to me that you'd be mo' comfortable without that sheet of crape floatin' down yo' back."

"I've never been comfortable in my life," retorted my mother, "an' I don't expect to begin when I dress

myself to go to a funeral. It's got to be, I reckon, an' it's what I'm used to; but if thar's a man alive that would stand over a stove with a crape veil on his head, I'd be obliged to him if he'd step up an' show his face."

At this point the half-grown girl who had promised to look after the baby arrived, and with her assistance, my mother set about putting the house in order, while my father, as soon as his luncheon basket was packed, wished us a pleasant drive, and started for old Timothy Ball's marble yard, where he worked. At the sink in the kitchen my mother, with her crape veil pinned back, and her bombazine sleeves rolled up, stood with her arms deep in soapsuds.

"Ma," I asked, going up to her and turning my back while she unfastened my bib with one soapy hand, "did you ever hear anybody call you common?"

"Call me what?"

"Common. What does it mean when anybody calls you common?"

"It means generally that anybody is a fool."

"Then am I, ma?"

"Air you what?"

"Am I common?"

"For the Lord's sake, Benjy, stop yo' pesterin'. What on earth has gone an' set that idee workin' inside yo' head?"

"Is pa common?"

She meditated an instant. "Wall, he wa'nt born a Savage, but I'd never have called him common — exactly," she answered.

"Then perhaps you are?"

"You talk like a fool! Haven't I told you that I wa'nt?" she snapped.

"Then if you ain't an' pa ain't exactly, how can I be?" I concluded with triumph.

"Whoever said you were? Show me the person."

"It wa'nt a person. It was a little girl."

"A little girl? You mean the half-drowned brat I wrapped up in yo' grandma's old blanket shawl I set the muffin dough under? To think of my sendin' yo' po' tired pa splashin' out with 'em into the rain. So she called you common?"

But the sound of a carriage turning the corner fell on my ears, and running hastily into the sitting-room, I opened the door and looked out eagerly for signs of the approaching funeral.

A bright morning had followed the storm, and the burnished leaves, so restless the day before, lay now wet and still under the sunshine. I had stepped joyously over the threshold, to the sunken brick pavement, when my mother, moved by a sudden anxiety for my health, called me back, and in spite of my protestations, wrapped me in a grey blanket shawl, which she fastened at my throat with the enormous safety-pin she had taken from her own waist. Much embarrassed by this garment, which dragged after me as I walked, I followed her sullenly out of the house and as far as our neighbour's doorstep, where I was ordered to sit down and wait until the service was over. As the stir of her crape passed into the little hall, I seated myself obediently on the single step which led straight from the street, and made faces, during the long wait, at the merry driver of the hearse

— a decrepit negro of ancient days, who grinned provokingly at the figure I cut in my blanket shawl.

"Hi! honey, is you got on swaddlin' close er a windin' sheet?" he enquired. "I'se a-gittin' near bline en I cyarn mek out."

"You jest wait till I'm bigger an' I'll show you," was my peaceable rejoinder.

"Wat's dat you gwine sho' me, boy? I reckon I'se done seed mo' curus things den you in my lifetime."

I looked up defiantly. Between the aristocratic, if fallen, negro and myself there was all the instinctive antagonism that existed in the Virginia of that period between the "quality" and the "poor white trash."

"If you don't lemme alone you'll see mo'n you wanter."

"Whew! I reckon you gwine tu'n out sump'im' moughty outlandish, boy. I'se a-lookin' wid all my eyes an I cyarn see nuttin' at all."

"Wait till I'm bigger an' you'll see it," I answered.

"I'se sho'ly gwine ter wait, caze ef'n hits mo' curus den you is en dat ar windin' sheet, hit's a sight dat I'se erbleeged ter lay eyes on. Wat's yo' name, suh?" he enquired, with a mocking salute.

"I am Ben Starr," I replied promptly, "an' if you wait till I get bigger, I'll bus' you open."

"Hi! hi! wat you wanter bus' me open fur, boy? Is you got a pa?"

"He's Thomas Starr, an' he cuts lambs and doves on tombstones. I've seen 'em, an' I'm goin' to learn to cut 'em, too, when I grow up. I like lambs."

The door behind me opened suddenly without warning, and as I scrambled from the doorstep, my enemy,

the merry driver, backed his creaking vehicle to the sidewalk across which the slow procession of mourners filed. A minute later I was caught up by my mother's hand, and borne into a carriage, where I sat tightly wedged between two sombre females.

"So you've brought yo' little boy along, Mrs. Starr," remarked a third from the opposite seat, in an aggressive voice.

"Yes, he had a cold an' I thought the air might do him good," replied my mother with her society manner.

"Wall, I've nine an' not one of 'em has ever been to a funeral," returned the questioner. "I've al'ays been set dead against 'em for children, ain't you, Mrs. Boxley?"

Mrs. Boxley, a placid elderly woman, who had already begun to doze in her corner, opened her eyes and smiled on me in a pleasant and friendly way.

"To tell the truth I ain't never been able really to enjoy a child's funeral," she replied.

"I'm sure we're all mighty glad to have him along, Mrs. Starr," observed the fourth woman, who was soft and peaceable and very fat. "He's a fine, strong boy now, ain't he, ma'am?"

"Middlin' strong. I hope he ain't crowdin' you. Edge closer to me, Benjy."

I edged closer until her harsh bombazine sleeve seemed to scratch the skin from my cheek. Mrs. Boxley had dozed again, and sinking lower on the seat, I had just prepared myself to follow her example, when a change in the conversation brought my wandering wits instantly together, and I sat bolt upright

while my eyes remained fixed on the small, straggling houses we were passing.

"Yes, she would go, rain or no rain," my mother was saying, and I knew that in that second's snatch of sleep she had related the story of our last evening's adventure. "To be sure she may have been all she ought to be, but I must say I can't help mistrustin' that little, palaverin' kind of a woman with eyes like a scared rabbit."

"If it was Sarah Mickleborough, an' I think it was, she had reason enough to look scared, po' thing," observed Mrs. Kidd, the soft fat woman, who sat on my left side. "They've only lived over here in the old Adams house for three months, but the neighbours say he's almost killed her twice since they moved in. She came of mighty set up, high falutin' folks, you know, an' when they wouldn't hear of the marriage, she ran off with him one night about ten years ago just after he came home out of the army. He looked fine, they say, in uniform, on his big black horse, but after the war ended he took to drink and then from drink, as is natchel, he took to beatin' her. It's strange — ain't it? — how easily a man's hand turns against a woman once he's gone out of his head?"

"Ah, I could see that she was the sort that's obliged to be beaten sooner or later if thar was anybody handy around to do it," remarked my mother. "Some women are made so that they're never happy except when they're hurt, an' she's one of 'em. Why, they can't so much as look at a man without invitin' him to ill-treat 'em."

"Thar ain't many women that know how to deal with a husband as well as you an' Mrs. Cudlip," remarked Mrs. Kidd, with delicate flattery.

"Po' Mrs. Cudlip. I hope she is bearin' up," sighed my mother. "'Twas the leg he lost at Seven Pines — wasn't it? — that supported her?"

"That an' the cheers he bottomed. The last work he did, po' man, was for Mrs. Mickleborough of whom we were speakin'. I used to hear of her befo' the war when she was pretty Miss Sarah Bland, in a white poke bonnet with pink roses."

"An' now never a day passes, they say, that Harry Mickleborough doesn't threaten to turn her an' the child out into the street."

"Are her folks still livin'? Why doesn't she go back to them?"

"Her father died six months after the marriage, an' the rest of 'em live up-town somewhar. The only thing that's stuck to her is her coloured mammy, Aunt Euphronasia, an' they tell me that that old woman has mo' influence over Harry Mickleborough than anybody livin'. When he gets drunk an' goes into one of his tantrums she walks right up to him an' humours him like a child."

As we drove on their voices grew gradually muffled and thin in my ears, and after a minute, in which I clung desperately to my eluding consciousness, my head dropped with a soft thud upon Mrs. Kidd's inviting bosom. The next instant I was jerked violently erect by my mother and ordered sternly to "keep my place an' not to make myself a nuisance by spreadin' about." With this admonition in my ears,

I pinched my leg and sat staring with heavy eyes out upon the quiet street, where the rolling of the slow wheels over the fallen leaves was the only sound that disturbed the silence. After ten bitter years the city was still bound by the terrible lethargy which had immediately succeeded the war; and on Church Hill it seemed almost as if we had been forgotten like the breastworks and the battle-fields in the march of progress. The grip of poverty, which was fiercer than the grip of armies, still held us, and the few stately houses showed tenantless and abandoned in the midst of their ruined gardens. Sometimes I saw an old negress in a coloured turban come out upon one of the long porches and stare after us, her pipe in her mouth and her hollowed palm screening her eyes; and once a noisy group of young mulattoes emerged from an alley and followed us curiously for a few blocks along the sidewalk.

Withdrawing my gaze from the window, I looked enviously at Mrs. Boxley, who snored gently in her corner. Then for the second time sleep overpowered me, and in spite of my struggles, I sank again on Mrs. Kidd's bosom.

"Thar, now, don't think of disturbin' him, Mrs. Starr. He ain't the least bit in my way. I can look right over his head," I heard murmured over me as I slid blissfully into unconsciousness.

What happened after this I was never able to remember, for when I came clearly awake again, we had reached our door, and my mother was shaking me in the effort to make me stand on my feet.

"He's gone and slept through the whole thing," she

remarked irritably to President, while I stumbled after them across the pavement, with the fringed ends of my blanket shawl rustling the leaves.

"He's too little. You might have let me go, ma,' replied President, as he dragged me, sleepy eyes, ruffled flaxen hair, and trailing shawl over the doorstep.

"An' you're too big," retorted my mother, removing the long black pins from her veil, and holding them in her mouth while she carefully smoothed and folded the lengths of crape. "You could never have squeezed in between us, an' as it was Mrs. Kidd almost overlaid Benjy. But you didn't miss much," she hastened to assure him, "I declar' I thought at one time we'd never get on it all went so slowly."

Having placed her bonnet and veil in the tall white bandbox upon the table, she hurried off to prepare our dinner, while President urged me in an undertone to "sham sick" that afternoon so that he wouldn't have to take me out for an airing on the hill.

"But I want to go," I responded selfishly, wide awake at the prospect. "I want to see the old Adams house where the little girl lives."

"If you go I can't play checkers, an' it's downright mean. What do you care about little girls? They ain't any good."

"But this little girl has got a drunken father."

"Well, you won't see *him* anyway, so what is the use?"

"She lives in a big house an' it's got a big garden -- as big as that!" I streched out my arms in a vain attempt to impress his imagination, but he merely

looked scornful and swore a mighty vow that he'd "be jiggered if he'd keep on playin' nurse-girl to a muff."

At the time he put my pleading sternly aside, but a couple of hours later, when the afternoon was already waning, he relented sufficiently to take me out on the ragged hill, which was covered thickly with poke-berry, yarrow, and stunted sumach. Before our feet the ground sank gradually to the sparkling river, and farther away I could see the silhouette of an anchored vessel etched boldly against the rosy clouds of the sunset.

As I stood there, holding fast to his hand, in the high wind that blew up from the river, a stout gentleman, leaning heavily on a black walking-stick, with a big gold knob at the top, came panting up the slope and paused beside us, with his eyes on the western sky. He was hale, handsome, and ruddy-faced, with a bunch of iron-grey whiskers on either cheek, and a vivacious and merry eye which seemed to catch at a twinkle whenever it met mine. His rounded stomach was spanned by a massive gold watch-chain, from which dangled a bunch of seals that delighted my childish gaze.

"It's a fine view," he observed pleasantly, patting my shoulder as if I were in some way responsible for the river, the anchored vessel, and the rosy sunset. "I moved up-town as soon as the war ended, but I still manage to crawl back once in a while to watch the afterglow."

"Where does the sun go," I asked, "when it slips way down there on the other side of the river?"

The gentleman smiled benignly, and I saw from his

merry glance that he did not share my mother's hostility to the enquiring mind.

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised if it went to the wrong side of the world for little boys and girls over there to get up by," he replied.

"May I go there, too, when I'm big?"

"To the wrong side of the world? You may, who knows?"

"Have you ever been there? What is it like?"

"Not yet, not yet, but there's no telling. I've been across the ocean, though, and that's pretty far. I went once in a ship that ran through the blockade and brought in a cargo of Bibles."

"What did you want with so many Bibles? We've got one. It has gilt clasps."

"Want with the Bibles! Why, every one of these Bibles, my boy, may have saved a soul."

"Has our Bible saved a soul? An' whose soul was it? It stays on our centre table, an' my name's in it. I've seen it."

"Indeed! and what may your name be?"

"Ben Starr. That's my name. What is yours? Is yo' name in the Bible? Does everybody's name have to be in the Bible if they're to be saved? Who put them in there? Was it God or the angels? If I blot my name out can I still go to heaven? An' if yours isn't in there will you have to be damned? Have you ever been damned an' what does it feel like?"

"Shut up, Benjy, or ma'll wallop you," growled President, squeezing my hand so hard that I cried aloud.

"Ah, he's a fine boy, a promising boy, a remarkable boy," observed the gentleman, with one finger in his waistcoat pocket. "Wouldn't you like to grow up and be President, my enquiring young friend?"

"No, sir, I'd rather be God," I replied, shaking my head.

All the gentleman's merry grey eyes seemed to run to sparkles.

"Ah, there's nothing, after all, like the true American spirit," he said, patting my shoulder. Then he laughed so heartily that his gold-rimmed eye-glasses fell from his eyes and dangled in the air at the end of a silk cord. "I'm afraid your aspiration is too lofty for my help," he said, "but if you should happen to grow less ambitious as you grow older, then remember, please, that my name is General Bolingbroke."

"Why, you're the president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad, sir!" exclaimed President, admiring and embarrassed.

The General sighed, though even I could see that this simple tribute to his fame had not left him unmoved. "Ten years ago I was the man who tried to save Johnston's army, and to-day I am only a railroad president," he answered, half to himself; "times change and fames change almost as quickly. When all is said, however, there may be more lasting honour in building a country's trade than in winning a battle. I'll have a tombstone some day and I want written on it, 'He brought help to the sick land and made the cotton flower to bloom anew.' My name is General Bolingbroke," he added, with his genial and enarming smile. "You will not forget it?"

I assured him that I should not, and that if it could be done, I'd try to have it written in our Bible with gilt clasps, at which he thanked me gravely as he shook my hand.

"An' I think now I'd rather be president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad, sir," I concluded.

"Young man, I fear you're with the wind," he said, laughing, and added, "I've a nephew just about your age and at least a head shorter, what do you think of that?"

"Has he a kite?" I enquired eagerly. "I have, an' a top an' ten checkers an' a big balloon."

"Have you, indeed? Well, my poor boy is not so well off, I regret to say. But don't you think your prosperity is excessive considering the impoverished condition of the country?"

The big words left me gasping, and fearing that I had been too boastful for politeness, I hastened to inform him that "although the balloon was very big, it was also bu'sted, which made a difference."

"Ah, it is, is it? Well, that does make a difference."

"If your boy hasn't any checkers I'll give him half of mine," I added with a gulp.

With an elaborate flourish the General drew out a stiffly starched pocket handkerchief and blew his nose. "That's a handsome offer and I'll repeat it without fail," he said.

Then he shook hands again and marched down the hill with his gold-headed stick tapping the ground.

"Now you'll come and trot home, I reckon," said President, when he had disappeared.

But the spirit of revolt had lifted its head within me, for through a cleft in the future, I saw myself already as the president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad, with a jingling bunch of seals and a gold-headed stick.

"I ain't goin' that way," I said, "I'm goin' home by the old Adams house where the little girl lives."

"No, you ain't either. I'll tell ma on you."

"I don't care. If you don't take me home by the old Adams house, you'll have to carry me every step of the way, an' I'll make myself heavy."

For a long minute President wrinkled his brows and thought hard in silence. Then an idea appeared to penetrate his slow mind, and he grasped me by the shoulder and shook me until I begged him to stop.

"If I take you home that way will you promise to sham sick to-morrow, so I shan't have to bring you out?"

The price was high, but swallowing my disappointment I met it squarely.

"I will if you'll lift me an' let me look over the wall."

"Hope you may die?"

"Hope I may die."

"Wall, it ain't anything to see but jest a house," remarked President, as I held out my hand, "an' girls ain't worth the lookin' at."

"She called me common," I said, soberly.

"Oh, shucks!" retorted President, with fine scorn, and we said no more.

Clinging tightly to his hand I trudged the short blocks in silence. As I was little, and he was very large for his years, it was with difficulty that I kept

pace with him; but by taking two quick steps to his single slow one, I managed to cover the same distance in almost the same number of minutes. He was a tall, overgrown boy, very fat for his age, with a foolish, large-featured face which continued to look sheepishly amiable even when he got into a temper.

"Is it far, President?" I enquired at last between panting breaths.

"There 'tis," he answered, pointing with his free hand to a fine old mansion, with a broad and hospitable front, from which the curved iron railing bent in a bright bow to the pavement. It was the one great house on the hill, with its spreading wings, its stuccoed offices, its massive white columns at the rear, which presided solemnly over the terraced hillside. A moment later he led me up to the high, spiked wall, and swung me from the ground to a secure perch on his shoulder. With my hands clinging to the iron nails that studded the wall, I looked over, and then caught my breath sharply at the thought that I was gazing upon an enchanted garden. Through the interlacing elm boughs the rosy light of the afterglow fell on the magnolias and laburnums, on the rose squares, and on the tall latticed arbours, where amid a glossy bower of foliage, a few pale microphylla roses bloomed out of season. Overhead the wind stirred, and one by one the small yellow leaves drifted, like wounded butterflies, down on the box hedges and the terraced walks.

"You've got to come down now — you're too heavy," said President from below, breathing hard as he held me up.

"Jest a minute — give me a minute longer an' I'll let you eat my blackberry jam at supper."

"An' you've promised on yo' life to sham sick tomorrow?"

"I'll sham sick an' I'll let you eat my jam, too, if you'll hold me a little longer."

He lifted me still higher, and clutching desperately to the iron spikes, I hung there quivering, breathless, with a thumping heart. A glimmer of white flitted between the box rows on a lower terrace, and I saw that the princess of the enchanted garden was none other than my little girl of the evening before. She was playing quietly by herself in a bower of box, building small houses of moss and stones, which she erected with infinite patience. So engrossed was she in her play that she seemed perfectly oblivious of the fading light and of the birds and squirrels that ran past her to their homes in the latticed arbours. Higher and higher rose her houses of moss and stones, while she knelt there, patient and silent, in the terrace walk with the small, yellow leaves falling around her.

"That's a square deal now," said President, dropping me suddenly to earth. "You'd better come along and trot home or you'll get a lamming."

My enchanted garden had vanished, the spiked wall rose over my head, and before me, as I turned homeward, spread all the familiar commonplaceness of Church Hill.

"How long will it be befo' I can climb up by myself?" I asked.

"When you grow up. You're nothin' but a kid."

"An' when'll I grow up if I keep on fast?"

"Oh, in ten or fifteen years, I reckon."

"Shan't I be big enough to climb up befo' then?"

"Look here, you shut up! I'm tired answerin' questions," shouted my elder brother, and grasping his hand I trotted in a depressed silence back to our little home.

CHAPTER III

A PAIR OF RED SHOES

I AWOKE the next morning a changed creature from the one who had fallen asleep in my trundle-bed. In a single hour I had awakened to the sharp sense of contrast, to the knowledge that all ways of life were not confined to the sordid circle in which I lived. Outside the poverty, the ugliness, the narrow streets, rose the spiked wall of the enchanted garden; and when I shut my eyes tight, I could see still the half-bared elms arching against the sunset, and the old house beyond, with its stuccoed wings and its grave white columns, which looked down on the magnolias and laburnums just emerging from the twilight on the lower terrace. In the midst of this garden I saw always the little girl patiently building her houses of moss and stones, and it seemed to me that I could hardly live through the days until I grew strong enough to leap the barriers and play beside her in the bower of box.

"Ma," I asked, measuring myself against the red and white cloth on the table, "does it look to you as if I were growin' up?"

The air was strong with the odour of frying bacon, and when my mother turned to answer me, she held a smoking skillet extended like a votive offering in her right hand. She was busy preparing breakfast for

Mrs. Cudlip, whose husband's funeral we had attended the day before, and as usual when any charitable mission was under way, her manner to my father and myself had taken a biting edge.

"Don't talk foolishness, Benjy," she replied, stopping to push back a loosened wiry lock of hair; "it's time to think about growin' up when you ain't been but two years in breeches. Here, if you're through breakfast, I want you to step with this plate of muffins to Mrs. Cudlip. Tell her I sent 'em an' that I hope she is bearin' up."

"That you sent 'em an' that you hope she is bearin' up," I repeated.

"That's it now. Don't forget what I told you befo' you're there. Thomas, have you buttered that batch of muffins?"

My father handed me the plate, which was neatly covered with a red-bordered napkin.

"Did you tell me to lay a slice of middlin' along side of 'em, Susan?" he humbly enquired.

Without replying to him in words, my mother seized the plate from me, and lifting the napkin, removed the offending piece of bacon, which she replaced in the dish.

"I thought even you, Thomas, would have had mo' feelin' than to send middlin' to a widow the day arter she has buried her husband — even a one-legged one! Middlin' indeed! One egg an' that soft boiled, will be as near a solid as she'll touch for a week. Keep along, Benjy, an' be sure to say just what I told you."

I did my errand quickly, and returning, asked eagerly

if I might go out all by myself an' play for an hour. "I'll stay close in the churchyard if you'll lemme go," I entreated.

"Run along then for a little while, but if you go out of the churchyard, you'll get a whippin'," replied my mother.

With this threat ringing like a bell in my ears, I left the house and walked quickly along the narrow pavement to where, across the wide street, I discerned the white tower and belfry which had been added by a later century to the parish church of Saint John. Overhead there was a bright blue sky, and the October sunshine, filtering through the bronzed network of sycamore and poplar, steeped the flat tombstones and the crumbling brick vaults in a clear golden light. The church stood upon a moderate elevation above the street, and I entered it now by a short flight of steps, which led to a grassy walk that did not end at the closed door, but continued to the brow of the hill, where a few scattered slabs stood erect as sentinels over the river banks. For a moment I stood among them, watching the blue haze of the opposite shore; then turning away I rolled over on my back and lay at full length in the periwinkle that covered the ground. From beyond the church I could hear Uncle Methusalah, the negro caretaker, raking the dead leaves from the graves, and here and there among the dark boles of the trees there appeared presently thin bluish spirals of smoke. The old negro's figure was still hidden, but as his rake stirred the smouldering piles, I could smell the sharp sweet odour of the burning leaves. Sometimes a wren or a sparrow fluttered in and out of

the periwinkle, and once a small green lizard glided like the shadow of a moving leaf over a tombstone. One sleeper among them I came to regard, as I grew somewhat older, almost with affection — not only because he was young and a soldier, but because the tall marble slab implored me to "tread lightly upon his ashes." Not once during the many hours when I played in the churchyard, did I forget myself and run over the sunken grave where he lay.

The sound of the moving rake passed the church door and drew nearer, and the grey head of Uncle Methusalah appeared suddenly from behind an ivied tree trunk. Sitting up in the periwinkle, I watched him heap the coloured leaves around me into a brilliant pile, and then bending over hold a small flame close to the curling ends. The leaves, still moist from the rain, caught slowly, and smouldered in a scented cloud under the trees.

"Dis yer trash ain' gwine ter bu'n twel hit's smoked out," he remarked in a querulous voice.

"Uncle Methusalah," I asked, springing up, "how old are you?"

With a leisurely movement, he dragged his rake over the walk, and then bringing it to rest at his feet, leaned his clasped hands on the end of it, and looked at me over the burning leaves. He wore an old, tightly fitting army coat of Union blue, bearing tarnished gold epaulets upon the shoulders, and around his throat a red bandanna handkerchief was wrapped closely to keep out the "chills."

"Gaud-a-moughty, honey!" he replied, "I'se so ole dat I'se done clean furgit ter count."

"I reckon you knew almost everybody that's buried here, didn't you?"

"Mos' un um, chile, but I ain't knowed near ez many ez my ole Marster. He done shuck hans w'en he wuz live wid um great en small. I'se done hyern 'im tell in my time how he shuck de han' er ole Marse Henry right over dar in dat ar church."

"Who was ole Marse Henry?" I enquired.

"I dunno, honey, caze he died afo' my day, but he mus' hev done a powerful heap er talkin' while he wuz 'live."

"Whom did he talk to, Uncle Methusalah?"

"Ter hisself mostly, I reckon, caze you know folks ain' got time al'ays ter be lisen'in'. But hit wuz en dish yer church dat he stood up en ax 'em please ter gin 'im liberty er ter gin 'im deaf."

"An' which did they give him, Uncle?"

"Wall, honey, ez fur ez I recollect de story dey gun 'im bofe."

Bending over in his old blue army coat with the tarnished epaulets, he prodded the pile of leaves, where the scented smoke hung low in a cloud. The wind stirred softly in the grass, and a small flame ran along a bent twig of maple to a single scarlet leaf at the end.

"Did they give 'em to him because he talked too much?" I asked.

"I ain' never hyern ner better reason, chile. Folks cyarn' stan' too much er de gab nohow, en' dey sez dat he 'ouldn't let up, but kep' up sech a racket dat dey couldn't git ner sleep. Den at las' ole King George over dar in England sent de hull army clear across de water jes' ter shet his mouf."

"An' did he shut it?"

"Dat's all er hit dat I ever hyern tell, boy, but ef'n you don' quit axin' folks questions day in en day out, he'll send all de way over yer agin' jes' ter shet yourn."

He went off, gathering the leaves into another pile at a little distance, and after a moment I followed him and stood with my back against a high brick vault.

"Is there any way, Uncle Methusalah, that you can grow up befo' yo' time?" I asked.

"Dar 'tis agin!" exclaimed the old negro, but he added kindly enough, "Dey tell me you kin do hit by stretchin', chile, but I ain' never seed hit wid my eyes, en w'at I ain' seed wid my eyes I ain' set much sto' by."

His scepticism, however, honest as it was, did not prevent my seizing upon the faint hope he offered, and I had just begun to stretch myself violently against the vault, when a voice speaking at my back brought my heels suddenly to the safe earth again.

"Boy," said the voice, "do you want a dog?"

Turning quickly I found myself face to face with the princess of the enchanted garden. She wore a fresh white coat and a furry white cap and a pair of red shoes that danced up and down. In her hand she carried a dirty twine string, the other end of which was tied about the neck of a miserable grey and white mongrel puppy.

"Do you want a dog, boy?" she repeated, as proudly as if she offered a canine prize.

The puppy was ugly, ill-bred, and dirty, but not an instant did I hesitate in the response I made.

"Yes, I want a dog," I answered as gravely as she had spoken.

She held out the string and my fist closed tightly over it. "I found him in the gutter," she explained, "and I gave him a plate of bread and milk because he is so young. Grandmama wouldn't let me keep him, as I have three others. I think it was very cruel of grandmama."

"I may keep him," I responded, "I ain't got any grandmama. I'll let him sleep in my bed."

"You must give him a bath first," she said, "and put him by the fire to dry. They wouldn't let me bring him into our house, but yours is such a little one that it will hardly matter."

At this my pride dropped low. "You live in the great big house with the high wall around the garden," I returned wistfully.

She nodded, drawing back a step or two with a quaint little air of dignity, and twisting a tassel on her coat in and out of her fingers, which were encased in white crocheted mittens. The only touch of colour about her was made by her small red shoes.

"I haven't lived there long, and I remember where we came from — way — away from here, over yonder across the river." She lifted her hand and pointed across the brick vault to the distant blue on the opposite shore of the James. "I liked it over there because it was the country and we lived by ourselves, mamma and I. She taught me to knit and I knitted a whole shawl — as big as that — for grandmama. Then papa came and took us away, but now he has gone and left us again, and I am glad. I hope he will

never come back because he is so very bad and I don't like him. Mamma likes him, but I don't."

"May I play with you in your garden?" I asked when she had finished; "I'd like to play with you an' I know ever so many nice ways to play that I made up out of my head."

She looked at me gravely and, I thought, regretfully.

"You can't because you're common," she answered. "It's a great pity. I don't really mind it myself," she added gently, seeing my downcast face, "I'd just every bit as lief play with you as not — a little bit — — but grandmama wouldn't —"

"But I don't want to play with your grandmama," I returned, on the point of tears.

"Well, you might come sometimes — not very often," she said at last, with a sympathetic touch on my sleeve, "an' you must come to the side gate where grandmama won't see you. I'll let you in an' mamma will not mind. But you mustn't come often," she concluded in a sterner tone, "only once or twice, so that there won't be any danger of my growin' like you. It would hurt grandmama dreadfully if I were ever to grow like you."

She paused a moment, and then began dancing up and down in her red shoes over the coloured leaves. "I'd like to play — play — play all the time!" she sang, whirling, a vivid little figure, around the crumbling vault.

The next minute she caught up the puppy in her arms and hugged him passionately before she turned away.

"His name is Samuel!" she called back over her shoulder as she ran out of the churchyard.

When she had gone down the short flight of steps and into the wide street, I tucked Samuel under my arm, and lugged him, not without inward misgivings, into the kitchen, where my mother stood at the ironing-board, with one foot on the rocker of Jessy's cradle.

"Ma," I began in a faltering and yet stubborn voice, "I've got a pup."

My mother's foot left the rocker, and she turned squarely on me, with a smoking iron half poised above the garment she had just sprinkled on the board.

"Whar did he come from?" she demanded, and moistened the iron with the thumb of her free hand.

"I got him in the churchyard. His name is Samuel."

For a moment she stared at the two of us in a stony silence. Then her face twitched as if with pain, the perplexed and anxious look appeared in her eyes, and her mouth relaxed.

"Wall, he's ugly enough to be named Satan," she said, "but I reckon if you want to you may put him in a box in the back yard. Give him that cold sheep's liver in the safe and then you come straight in and comb yo' head. It looks for all the world like a tousled straw stack."

All the afternoon I sat in our little sitting-room, and faithful to my promise, shammed sickness, while Samuel lay in his box in the back yard and howled.

"I'll have that dog taken up the first thing in the mornin'," declared my mother furiously, as she cleared the supper table.

"I reckon he's lonely out thar, Susan," urged my father, observing my trembling mouth, and eager, as usual, to put a pacific face on the moment.

"Lonely, indeed! I'm lonely in here, but I don't set up a howlin'. Thar're mighty few folks, be they dogs or humans, that get all the company they want in life."

Once I crept out into the darkness, and hugging Samuel around his dirty stomach besought him, with tears, to endure his lot in silence; but though he licked my face rapturously at the time, I had no sooner entered the house than his voice was lifted anew.

"To think of po' Mrs. Cudlip havin' to mourn in all that noise," commented my mother, as I undressed and got into my trundle-bed.

My pillow was quite moist before I went to sleep, while my mother's loud threats against Samuel sounded from the other side of the room with each separate garment that she laid on the chair at the foot of her bed. In sheer desperation at last I pulled the cover over my ears in an effort to shut out her thin, querulous tones. At the instant I felt that I was wicked enough to wish that I had been born without any mother, and I asked myself how *she* would like it if I raised as great a fuss about baby Jessy's crying as she did about Samuel's — who didn't make one-half the noise.

Here the light went out, and I fell asleep, to awaken an hour or two later because of the candle flash in my eyes. In the centre of the room my mother was standing in her grey dressing-gown, with a shawl over her head and the rapturously wriggling body of Samuel in her arms. Too amazed to utter an exclamation, I watched her silently while she made a bed with an old flannel petticoat before the waning fire. Then I saw her bend over and pat the head of the puppy with

her knotted hand before she crept noiselessly back to bed.

At this day I see her figure as distinctly as I saw it that instant by the candle flame — her soiled grey wrapper clutched over her flat bosom; her sallow, sharp-featured face, with bluish hollows in the temples over which her sparse hair strayed in locks; her thin, stooping shoulders under the knitted shawl; her sad, flint-coloured eyes, holding always that anxious look as if she were trying to remember some important thing which she had half forgotten.

So she appeared to my startled gaze for a single minute. Then the light went out, she faded into the darkness, and I fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH I PLAY IN THE ENCHANTED GARDEN

For the next two years, when my mother sent me on errands to McKenney's grocery store, or for a pitcher of milk to old Mrs. Triffit's, who kept a fascinating green parrot hanging under an arbour of musk cluster roses, it was my habit to run five or six blocks out of my way, and measure my growing height against the wall of the enchanted garden. On the worn bricks, unless they have crumbled away, there may still be seen the scratches from my penknife, by which I tried to persuade myself that each rapidly passing week marked a visible increase in my stature. Though I was a big boy for my age, the top of my straw-coloured hair reached barely halfway up the spiked wall; and standing on my tiptoes my hands still came far below the grim iron teeth at the top. Yet I continued to measure myself, week by week, against the barrier, until at last the zigzag scratches from my knife began to cover the bricks.

It was on a warm morning in spring during my ninth year, that, while I stood vigorously scraping the wall over my head, I heard a voice speaking in indignant tones at my back.

"You bad boy, what are you doing?" it said.

Wheeling about, I stood again face to face with the

little girl of the red shoes and the dancing feet. Except for her shoes she was dressed all in white just as I had last seen her, and this time, I saw with disgust, she held a whining and sickly kitten clasped to her breast.

"I know you are doing something you ought not to," she repeated, "what is it?"

"Nothink," I responded, and stared at her red shoes like one possessed.

"Then why were you crawling so close along the wall to keep me from seeing you?"

"I wa'nt."

"You wa'nt what?"

"I wa'nt crawlin' along the wall; I was just tryin' to look in," I answered defiantly.

An old negro "mammy," in a snowy kerchief and apron, appeared suddenly around the corner near which we stood, and made a grab at the child's shoulder.

"You jes let 'im alont, honey, en he ain' gwine hu't you," she said.

"He won't hurt me anyway," replied the little girl, as if I were a suspicious strange dog, "I'm not afraid of him."

Then she made a step forward and held the whining grey kitten toward me.

"Don't you want a cat, boy?" she asked, in a coaxing tone.

My hands flew to my back, and the only reason I did not retreat before her determined advance was that I could hardly retreat into a brick wall.

"I've just found it in the alley a minute ago," she explained. "It's very little. I'd like to keep it, only I've got six already."

"I don't like cats," I replied stubbornly, shaking my head. "I saw Peter Finn's dog kill one. He shook it by the neck till it was dead. I'm goin' to train my dog to kill 'em, too."

Raising herself on the toes of her red shoes, she bent upon me a look so scorching that it might have burned a passage straight through me into the bricks.

"I knew you were a horrid bad boy. You looked it!" she cried.

At this I saw in my imagination the closed gate of the enchanted garden, and my budding sportsman's proclivities withered in the white blaze of her wrath.

"I don't reckon I'll train him to catch 'em by the back of thar necks," I hastened to add.

At this she turned toward me again, her whole vivid little face with its red mouth and arched black eyebrows inspired by a solemn purpose.

"If you'll promise never, never to kill a cat, I'll let you come into the garden — for a minute," she said.

I hesitated for an instant, dazzled by the prospect and yet bargaining for better terms. "Will you let me walk under the arbours and down all the box-bordered paths?"

She nodded. "Just once," she responded gravely.

"An' may I play under the trees on the terrace where you built yo' houses of moss and stones?"

"For a little while. But I can't play with you, because — because you don't look clean."

My heart sank like lead to my waist line, and I looked down ashamed at my dirty hands.

"I — I'd rather play with you," I faltered.

"Fur de Lawd's sake, honey, come in en let dat ar gutter limb alont," exclaimed the old negress, wagging her turbaned head.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do," said her charge, after a deep moment; "I'll let you play with me for a little while if you'll take the cat."

"But I ain't got any use for it," I stammered.

"Take it home for a pet. Grandmama won't let any more come on the place. She's very cruel is grandmama, isn't she, mammy?"

"Go way, chile, dar ain' nobody dat 'ould want all dem ar critters," rejoined the old negress.

"*I* do," said the little girl, and sighed softly.

"I'll take it home with me," I began desperately at last, "if you'll let me play with you the whole evening."

"And take you into the house?"

"An' take me into the house," I repeated doggedly.

Her glance brushed me from head to foot, while I writhed under it. "I wonder why you don't wash your face," she observed in her cool, impersonal manner.

I fell back a step and stared defiantly at the ground.

"I ain't got any water," I answered, driven to bay.

"I think if you'd wash it ever so hard and brush your hair flat on your head, you'd look very nice — for a boy," she remarked. "I like your eyes because they're blue, and I have a dog with blue eyes exactly like yours. Did you ever see a blue-eyed dog? He's a collie. But your hair stands always on end and it's the colour of straw."

"It growed that way," I returned. "You can't get it to be flat. Ma has tried."

"I bet I could," she rejoined, and caught at the old woman's hand. "This is my mammy an' her name is Euphronasia, an' she's got blue eyes an' golden hair," she cried, beginning to dance up and down in her red shoes.

"Gawd erlive, lamb, I'se ez black ez a crow's foot," protested the old woman, at which the dance of the red shoes changed into a stamp of anger.

"You aren't! — You aren't! You've got blue eyes an' golden hair!" screamed the child. "I won't let you say you haven't, — I won't let anybody say you haven't!"

It took a few minutes to pacify her, during which the old negress perjured herself to the extent of declaring on her word of honour that she *had* blue eyes and golden hair; and when the temper of her "lamb" was appeased, we turned the corner, approached the front of the house, and ascended the bright bow of steps. As we entered the wide hall, my heart thumped so violently that I hurriedly buttoned my coat lest the little girl should hear the sound and turn indignantly to accuse me of disturbing the peace. Then as the front door closed softly behind us, I stood blinking nervously in the dim green light which entered through the row of columns at the rear, beyond which I saw the curving stairway and the two miniature yew trees at its foot. There was a strange musty smell about the house — a smell that brings to me now, when I find it in old and unlighted buildings, the memory of the high ceiling, the shining floor over which I moved so cautiously, and the long melancholy rows of moth-eaten stags' heads upon the wall.

A door at the far end was half open, and inside the room there were two ladies — one of them very little and old and shrivelled, and the other a pretty, brown-haired, pliant creature, whom I recognised instantly as our visitor of that stormy October evening more than two years ago. She was reading aloud when we entered, in a voice which sounded so soft and pious that I wondered if I ought to fold my hands and bow my head as I had been taught to do in the infant Sunday-school.

"Be careful not to mush your words, Sarah; the habit is growing upon you," remarked the elder lady in a sharp, imperative tone.

"Shall I read it over, mother? I will try to speak more distinctly," returned the other submissively, and she began again a long paragraph which, I gathered vaguely, related to that outward humility which is the becoming and appropriate garment for a race of miserable sinners.

"That is better," commented the old lady, in an utterly ungrateful manner, "though you have never succeeded in properly rolling your *r*'s. There, that will do for to-day, we will continue the sermon upon Humility to-morrow."

She was so little and thin and wrinkled that it was a mystery to me, as I looked at her, how she managed to express so much authority through so small a medium. The chair in which she sat seemed almost to swallow her in its high arms of faded green leather; and out of her wide, gathered skirt of brocade, her body rose very erect, like one of my mother's black-headed bonnet pins out of her draped pincushion.

On her head there was a cap of lace trimmed gayly with purple ribbons, and beneath this festive adornment, a fringe of false curls, still brown and lustrous, lent a ghastly coquetry to her mummied features. In the square of sunshine, between the gauze curtains at the window, a green parrot, in a wire cage, was scolding viciously while it pecked at a bit of sponge-cake from its mistress's hand. At the time I was too badly frightened to notice the wonderful space and richness of the room, with its carved rosewood bookcases, and its dim portraits of beruffled cavaliers and gravely smiling ladies.

"Sally," said the old lady, turning upon me a piercing glance which was like the flash of steel in the sunlight, "is that a boy?"

Going over to the armchair, the little girl stood holding the kitten behind her, while she kissed her grandmother's cheek.

"What is it, Sally, dear?" asked the younger woman, closing her book with a sigh.

"It's a boy, mamma," answered the child.

At this the old lady stiffened on her velvet cushions. "I thought I had told you, Sally," she remarked icily, "that there is nothing that I object to so much as a boy. Dogs and cats I have tolerated in silence, but since I have been in this house no boy has set foot inside the doors."

"I am sure, dear mamma, that Sally did not mean to disobey you," murmured the younger woman, almost in tears.

"Yes, I did, mamma," answered the child, gravely, "I meant to disobey her. But he has such nice blue

eyes," she went on eagerly, her lips glowing as she talked until they matched the bright red of her dancing shoes; "an' he's goin' to take a kitten home for a pet, an' he says the reason he doesn't wash his face is because he hasn't any water."

"Is it possible," enquired the old lady in the manner of her pecking parrot, "that he does not wash his face?"

My pride could bear it no longer, and opening my mouth I spoke in a loud, high voice.

"If you please, ma'am, I wash my face every day," I said, "and all over every Saturday night."

She was still feeding the parrot with a bit of cake, and as I spoke, she turned toward me and waved one of her wiry little hands, which reminded me of a bird's claw, under its ruffle of yellowed lace.

"Bring him here, Sally, and let me see him," she directed, as if I had been some newly entrapped savage beast.

Catching me by the arm, Sally obediently led me to the armchair, where I stood awkward and trembling, with my hands clutching the flaps of my breeches' pockets, and my eyes on the ground.

For a long pause the old lady surveyed me critically with her merciless eyes. Then, "Give him a piece of cake, Sally," she remarked, when the examination was over.

Sally's mother had come up softly behind me while I writhed under the piercing gaze, and bending over she encircled my shoulders with her protecting arms.

"He's a dear little fellow, with such pretty blue eyes," she said.

As she spoke I looked up for the first time, and my

glance met my reflection in a long, gold-framed mirror hanging between the windows. The "pretty blue eyes" I saw, but I saw also the straw-coloured hair, the broad nose sprinkled with freckles, and the sturdy legs disguised by the shapeless breeches, which my mother had cut out of a discarded dolman she had once worn to funerals. It was a figure which might have raised a laugh in the ill-disposed, but the women before me carried kind hearts in their bosoms, and even grandmama's chilling scrutiny ended in nothing worse than a present of cake.

"May I play with him just a little while, grandmama?" begged Sally, and when the old lady nodded permission, we joined hands and went through the open window out upon the sunny porch.

On that spring morning the colours of the garden were all clear white and purple, for at the foot of the curving stairway, and on the upper terrace, bunches of lilacs bloomed high above the small spring flowers that bordered the walk. Beneath the fluted columns a single great snowball bush appeared to float like a cloud in the warm wind. As we went together down the winding path to the box maze which was sprinkled with tender green, a squirrel, darting out of one of the latticed arbours, stopped motionless in the walk and sat looking up at us with a pair of bright, suspicious eyes.

"I reckon I could make him skeet, if I wanted to," I remarked, embarrassed rather than malevolent.

Her glance dwelt on me thoughtfully for a moment, while she stood there, kicking a pebble with the toe of a red shoe.

"An' I reckon I could make *you* skeet, if I wanted to," she replied with composure.

Since the parade of mere masculinity had failed to impress her, I resorted to subtler measures, and kneeling among the small spring flowers which powdered the lower terrace, I began laboriously erecting a palace of moss and stones.

"I make one every evening, but when the ghosts come out and walk up an' down, they scatter them," observed Sally, hanging attentively upon the work.

"Are there ghosts here really an' have you seen 'em?" I asked.

Stretching out her hand, she swept it in a circle over the growing palace. "They are all around here — everywhere," she answered. "I saw them one night when I was running away from my father. Mamma and I hid in that big box bush down there, an' the ghosts came and walked all about us. Do you have to run away from your father, too?"

For an instant I hesitated; then my pride triumphed magnificently over my truthfulness. "I ran clear out to the hill an' all the way down it," I rejoined.

"Is his face red and awful?"

"As red as — as an apple."

"An apple ain't awful."

"But he is. I wish you could see him."

"Would he kill you if he caught you?"

"He — he'd eat me," I panted.

She sighed gravely. "I wonder if all fathers are like that?" she said. "Anyway, I don't believe yours is as bad as mine."

"I'd like to know why he ain't?" I protested indignantly.

Her lips quivered and went upward at the corners with a trick of expression which I found irresistible even then.

"It's a pity that it's time for you to go home," she observed politely.

"I reckon I can stay a little while longer," I returned.

She shook her head, but I had already gone back to the unfinished palace, and as the work progressed, she forgot her hint of dismissal in watching the fairy towers. We were still absorbed in the building when her mother came down the curving stairway and into the maze of box.

"It's time for you to run home now, pretty blue eyes," she said in her soft girlish way. Then catching our hands in hers, she turned with a merry laugh, and ran with us up the terraced walk.

"Is your mamma as beautiful as mine?" asked Sally, when we came to a breathless stop.

"She's as beautiful as — as a wax doll," I replied stoutly.

"That's right," laughed the lady, stooping to kiss me. "You're a dear boy. Tell your mother I said so."

She went slowly up the steps as she spoke, and when I looked back a moment later, I saw her smiling down on me between two great columns, with the snowball bush floating in the warm wind beneath her and the swallows flying low in the sunshine over her head.

I had opened the side gate, when I felt a soft, furry touch on my hand, and Sally thrust the forgotten kitten into my arms.

"Be good to her," she said pleadingly. "Her name's Florabella."

Resisting a dastardly impulse to forswear my bargain, I tucked the mewing kitten under my coat, where it clawed me unobserved by any jeering boy in the street. Passing Mrs. Cudlip's house on my way home, I noticed at once that the window stood invitingly open, and yielding with a quaking heart to temptation, I leaned inside the vacant room, and dropped Florabella in the centre of the old lady's easy chair. Then, fearful of capture, I darted along the pavement and flung myself breathlessly across our doorstep.

A group of neighbours was gathered in the centre of our little sitting-room, and among them I recognised the flushed, perspiring face of Mrs. Cudlip herself. As I entered, the women fell slightly apart, and I saw that they regarded me with startled, compassionate glances. A queer, strong smell of drugs was in the air, and near the kitchen door my father was standing with a frightened and sheepish look on his face, as if he had been thrust suddenly into a prominence from which he shrank back abashed.

"Where's ma?" I asked, and my voice sounded loud and unnatural in my own ears.

One of the women — a large, motherly person, whom I remembered without recognising, crossed the room with a heavy step and took me into her arms. At this day I can feel the deep yielding expanse of her bosom, when pushing her from me, I looked round and repeated my question in a louder tone.

"Where's ma?"

"She was took of a sudden, dear," replied the woman, still straining me to her. "It came over her while she was standin' at the stove, an' befo' anybody could reach her, she dropped right down an' was gone."

She released me as she finished, and walking straight through the kitchen and the consoling neighbours, I opened the back door, and closing it after me, sat down on the single step. I can't remember that I shed a tear or that I suffered, but I can still see as plainly as if it were yesterday, the clothes-line stretching across the little yard and the fluttering, half-dried garments along it. There was a striped shirt of my father's, a faded blue one of mine, a pink slip of baby Jessy's, and a patched blue and white gingham apron I had seen only that morning tied at my mother's waist. Between the high board fence, above the sunken bricks of the yard, they danced as gayly as if she who had hung them there was not lying dead in the house. Samuel, trotting from a sunny corner, crept close to my side, with his warm tongue licking my hand, and so I sat for an hour watching the flutter of the blue, the pink, and the striped shirts on the clothes-line.

"There ain't nobody to iron 'em now," I said suddenly to Samuel, and then I wept.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH I START IN LIFE

With my mother's death all that was homelike and comfortable passed from our little house. For three days after the funeral the neglected clothes still hung on the line in the back yard, but on the fourth morning a slatternly girl, with red hair and arms, came from the grocery store at the corner, and gathered them in. My little sister was put to nurse with Mrs. Cudlip next door, and when, at the end of the week, President went off to work somewhere in a mining town in West Virginia, my father and I were left alone, except for the spasmodic appearances of the red-haired slattern. Gradually the dust began to settle and thicken on the dried cat-tails in the china vases upon the mantel; the "prize" red geranium dropped its blossoms and withered upon the sill; the soaking dish-cloths lay in a sloppy pile on the kitchen floor; and the vegetable rinds were left carelessly to rot in the bucket beside the sink. The old neatness and order had departed before the garments my mother had washed were returned again to the tub, and day after day I saw my father shake his head dismally over the soggy bread and the underdone beef. Whether or not he ever realised that it was my mother's hand that had kept him above the sur-

face of life, I shall never know; but when that strong grasp was relaxed, he went hopelessly, irretrievably, and unresistingly under. In the beginning there was merely a general wildness and disorder in his appearance, — first one button, then two, then three dropped from his coat. After that his linen was changed less often, his hair allowed to spread more stiffly above his forehead, and the old ashes from his pipe dislodged less frequently from the creases in his striped shirt. At the end of three months I noticed a new fact about him — a penetrating odour of alcohol which belonged to the very air he breathed. His mind grew slower and seemed at last almost to stop; his blue eyes became heavier and glazed at times, and presently he fell into the habit of going out in the evenings, and not returning until I had cried myself to sleep, under my tattered quilt, with Samuel hugged close in my arms. Sometimes the red-haired girl would stop after her work for a few friendly words, proving that a slovenly exterior is by no means incompatible with a kindly heart; but as a usual thing I was left alone, after the boys had gone home from their play in the street, to amuse myself and Samuel as I could through the long evening hours. Sometimes I brought in an apple or a handful of chestnuts given me by one of the neighbours and roasted them before the remnants of fire in the stove. Once or twice I opened my mother's closet and took down her clothes — her best bombazine dress, her black cashmere mantle trimmed with bugles, her long rustling crape veil, folded neatly beneath her bonnet in the tall bandbox — and half in grief, half in curiosity, I invaded those sacred pre-

cincts where my hands had never dared penetrate while she was alive. My great loss, from which probably in more cheerful surroundings I should have recovered in a few weeks, was renewed in me every evening by my loneliness and by the dumb sympathy of Samuel, who would stand wagging his tail for an hour at the sight of the cloak or the bonnet that she had worn. Like my father I grew more unkempt and ragged every day I lived. I ceased to wash myself, because there was nobody to make me. My buttons dropped off one by one and nobody scolded. I dared no longer go near the gate of the enchanted garden, fearing that if the little girl were to catch sight of me, she would call me "dirty," and run away in disgust. Occasionally my father would clap me upon the shoulder at breakfast, enquire how I was getting along, and give me a rusty copper to spend. But for the greater part of the time, I believe, he was hardly aware of my existence; the vacant, flushed look was almost always in his face when we met, and he stayed out so late in the evening that it was not often his stumbling footsteps aroused me when he came upstairs to bed.

So accustomed had I become to my lonely hours by the kitchen stove, with Samuel curled up at my feet, that when one night, about six months after my mother's death, I heard the unexpected sound of my father's tread on the pavement outside, I turned almost with a feeling of terror, and waited breathlessly for his unsteady hand on the door. It came after a minute, followed immediately by his entrance into the kitchen, and to my amazement I saw presently that he was

accompanied by a strange woman, whom I recognised at a glance as one of those examples of her sex that my mother had been used to classify sweepingly as "females." She was plump and jaunty, with yellow hair that hung in tight ringlets down to her neck, and pink cheeks that looked as if they might "come off" if they were thoroughly scrubbed. There was about her a spring, a bounce, an animation that impressed me, in spite of my inherited moral sense, as decidedly elegant.

My father's eyes looked more vacant and his face fuller than ever. "Benjy," he began at once in a husky voice, while his companion released his arm in order to put her ringlets to rights, "I've brought you a new mother."

At this the female's hands fell from her hair, and she looked round in horror. "What boy is that, Thomas?" she demanded, poised there in all her flashing brightness like a figure of polished brass.

"That boy," replied my father, as if at a loss exactly how to account for me, "that boy is Ben Starr — otherwise Benjy — otherwise —"

He would have gone on forever, I think, in his eagerness to explain me away, if the woman had not jerked him up with a peremptory question: "How did he come here?" she enquired.

Since nothing but the naked truth would avail him now, he uttered it at last in an eloquent monosyllable — "Born."

"But you told me there was not a chick or a child," she exclaimed in a rage.

For a moment he hesitated; then opening his mouth

slowly, he gave voice to the single witticism of his life.

"That was befo' I married you, dearie," he said.

"Well, how am I to know," demanded the female, "that you haven't got a parcel of others hidden away?"

"Thar's one, the littlest, put out to nurse next do', an' another, the biggest, gone to work in the West," he returned in his amiable, childish manner.

After my unfortunate introduction, however, the addition of a greater and a lesser appeared to impress her but little. She looked scornfully about the disorderly room, took off her big, florid bonnet, and began arranging her hair before the three-cornered mottled mirror on the wall. Then wheeling round in a temper, her eyes fell on Samuel, sitting dejectedly on his tail by my mother's old blue and white gingham apron.

"What is that?" she fired straight into my father's face.

"That," he responded, offering his unnecessary information as if it were a piece of flattery, "air the dawg, Sukey."

"Whose dawg?"

Goaded into defiance by this attack on my only friend, I spoke in a shrill voice from the corner into which I had retreated. "Mine," I said.

"Wall, I'll tell you what!" exclaimed the female, charging suddenly upon me, "if I've got to put up with a chance o' kids, I don't reckon I've got to be plagued with critters, too. Shoo, suh! get out!"

Seizing my mother's broom, she advanced resolutely to the attack, and an instant later, to my loud distress and to Samuel's unspeakable horror, she had whisked

him across the kitchen and through the back door out into the yard.

"Steady, Sukey, steady," remarked my father caressingly, much as he might have spoken to a favourite but unruly heifer. For an instant he looked a little crestfallen, I saw with pleasure, but as soon as Samuel was outside and the door had closed, he resumed immediately his usual expression of foolish good humour. It was impossible, I think, for him to retain an idea in his mind after the object of it had been removed from his sight. While I was still drying my eyes on my frayed coat sleeve, I watched him with resentment begin a series of playful lunges at the neck of the female, which she received with a sulky and forbidding air. Stealing away the next minute, I softly opened the back door and joined the outcast Samuel, where he sat whining upon the step.

The night was very dark, but beyond the looming chimneys a lonely star winked at me through the thick covering of clouds. I was a sturdy boy for my age, sound in body, and inwardly not given to sentiment or softness of any kind; but as I sat there on the doorstep, I felt a lump rise in my throat at the thought that Samuel and I were two small outcast animals in the midst of a shivering world. I remembered that when my mother was alive I had never let her kiss me except when she paid me by a copper or a slice of bread laid thickly with blackberry jam; and I told myself desperately that if she could only come back now, I would let her do it for nothing! She might even whip me because I'd torn my trousers on the back fence, and I thought I should hardly feel it. I recalled her last birthday, when I had gone down to the market with

five cents of my own to buy her some green gage plums, of which she was very fond, and how on the way up the hill, being tempted, I had eaten them all myself. At the time I had stifled my remorse with the assurance that she would far rather I should have the plums than eat them herself, but this was cold comfort to me to-night while I regretted my selfishness. If I had only saved her half, as I had meant to do if the hill had not been quite so long and so steep.

Samuel snuggled closer to me and we both shivered, for the night was fresh. The house had grown quiet inside; my father and his new wife had evidently left the kitchen and gone upstairs. As I sat there I realised suddenly, with a pang, that I could never go inside the door again; and rising to my feet, I struck a match and fumbled for a piece of chalk in my pocket. Then standing before the door I wrote in large letters across the panel:—

"Dear Pa.
I have gone to work.
Your Aff. son,
Ben Starr."

The blue flame of the match flickered an instant along the words; then it went out, and with Samuel at my heels, I crept through the back gate and down the alley to the next street, which led to the ragged brow of the hill. Ahead of me, as I turned off into Main Street, the scattered lights of the city showed like blurred patches upon the darkness. Gradually, while I went rapidly downhill, I saw the patches change into a nebulous cloud, and the cloud resolve itself presently

into straight rows of lamps. Few people were in the streets at that hour, and when I reached the dim building of the Old Market, I found it cold and deserted, except for a stray cur or two that snarled at Samuel from a heap of trodden straw under a covered wagon. Despite the fact that I was for all immediate purposes as homeless as the snarling curs, I was not without the quickened pulses which attend any situation that a boy may turn to an adventure. A high heart for desperate circumstances has never failed me, and it bore me company that night when I came back again with aching feet to the Old Market, and lay down, holding Samuel tight, on a pile of straw.

In a little while I awoke because Samuel was barking, and sitting up in the straw I saw a dim shape huddled beside me, which I made out, after a few startled blinks, to be the bent figure of a woman wrapped in a black shawl with fringed ends, which were pulled over her head and knotted under her chin. From the penetrating odour I had learned to associate with my father, I judged that she had been lately drinking, and the tumbled state of my coat convinced me that she had been frustrated by Samuel in a base design to rifle my pockets. Yet she appeared so miserable as she sat there rocking from side to side and crying to herself, that I began all at once to feel very sorry. It seemed to hurt her to cry and yet I saw that the more it hurt her the more she cried.

"If I were you," I suggested politely, "I'd go home right away."

"Home?" repeated the woman, with a hiccough, "what's home?"

"The place you live in."

"Lor, honey, I don't live in no place. I jest walks."

"But what do you do when you get tired?"

"I walks some mo'."

"An' don't you ever leave off?"

"Only when it's dark like this an' thar's no folks about."

"But what do folks say to you when they see you walkin'?"

"Say to me," she threw back her head and broke into a drunken laugh, "why, they say to me: 'Step lively!'"

She crawled closer, peering at me greedily under the pale glimmer of the street lamp.

"Why, you're a darlin' of a boy," she said, "an' such pretty blue eyes!" Then she rose to her feet and stood swaying unsteadily above me, while Samuel broke out into angry barks. "Shall I tell you a secret because of yo' blue eyes?" she asked. "It's this — whatever you do in this world, you step lively about it. I've done a heap of lookin' an' I've seen the ones who get on are the ones who step the liveliest. It ain't no matter where you're goin', it ain't no matter who's befo' you, if you want to get there first, step lively!"

She went out, taking her awful secret with her, and turning over I fell asleep again on my pile of straw. "If ever I have a dollar I'll give it to her so she may stop walkin'," was my last conscious thought.

My next awakening was a very different one, for the light was streaming into the market, and a cheerful red face was shining down, like a rising sun, over a wheelbarrow of vegetables.

"Don't you think it's about time all honest folk were out of bed, sonny?" enquired a voice.

"I ain't been here mo'n an hour," I retorted, resenting the imputation of slothfulness with a spirit that was not unworthy of my mother.

The open length of the market, I saw now, was beginning to present a busy, almost a festive, air. Stalls were already laden with fruit and vegetables, and farmers' wagons covered with canvas, and driven by sunburnt countrymen, had drawn up to the sidewalk. Rising hurriedly to my feet, I began rubbing my eyes, for I had been dreaming of the fragrance of bacon in our little kitchen.

"Now I'd be up an' off to home, if I were you, sonny," observed the marketman, planting his wheelbarrow of vegetables on the brick floor, and beginning to wipe off the stall. "The sooner you take yo' whippin', the sooner you'll set easy again."

"There ain't anybody to whip me," I replied dolefully, staring at the sign over his head, on which was painted in large letters — "John Chitling. Fish, Oysters (in season). Vegetables. Fruits."

Stopping midway in his preparations, he turned on me his great beaming face, so like the rising sun that looked over his shoulder, while I watched his big jean apron swell with the panting breaths that drew from his stomach.

"Here's a boy that says he ain't got nobody to whip him!" he exclaimed to his neighbours in the surrounding stalls, — a poultryman, covered with feathers, a fish vender, bearing a string of mackerel in either hand, and a butcher, with his sleeves rolled up and a blood-stained apron about his waist.

"I al'ays knew you were thick-headed, John Chitling," remarked the fish dealer, with contempt, "but I never believed you were such a plum fool as not to know a tramp when you seed him."

"You ain't got but eleven of yo' own," observed the butcher, with a snicker; "I reckon you'd better take him along to round out the full dozen."

"If I've got eleven there ain't one of 'em that wa'nt welcome," responded John, his slow temper rising, "an' I reckon what the Lord sends he's willing to provide for."

"Oh, I reckon he is," sneered the fish dealer, who appeared to be of an unpleasant disposition, "so long as you ain't over-particular about the quality of the provision."

"Well, he don't provide us with yo' fish, anyway," retorted John; and I was watching excitedly for the coming blows when the butcher, who had been looking over me as reflectively as if I had been a spring lamb brought to slaughter, intervened with a peaceable suggestion that he should take me into his service.

"I'm on the lookout for a bright boy in my business," he observed.

But the sight of blood on his rolled-up shirt sleeves produced in me that strange sickness I had inherited from my mother, who used to pay an old coloured market man to come up and wring the necks of her chickens; and when the question was put to me if I'd like to be trained up for a butcher, I drew back and stood ready for instant flight in case they should attempt to decide my future by present force.

"I'd rather work for you," I said, looking straight at

John Chitling, for it occurred to me that if I were made to murder anything I'd rather it would be oysters.

"Ha! ha! he knows by the look of you, you're needin' one to make up the dozen," exclaimed the butcher.

"Well, I declar he does seem to have taken a regular fancy," acknowledged John, flattered by my decision. "I don't want any real hands now, sonny, but if you'd like to tote the marketing around with Solomon, I reckon I can let you have a square meal or so along with the others."

"What'll yo' old woman say to it, John?" enquired the poultryman, with a loud guffaw, "when you send her a new one of yo' own providin'?"

John Chitling was busily arranging a pile of turnips with what he doubtless thought was an artistic eye for colour, and the facetiousness of the poultryman reacted harmlessly from his thick head.

"You needn't worry about my wife, for she ain't worryin'," he rejoined, and the shine seemed to gather like moisture on his round red face under his shock of curling red hair. "She takes what comes an' leaves the Lord to do the tendin'."

At this a shout went up which I did not understand, until I came to know later that an impression existed in the neighbourhood that the Chitlings had left entirely too much of the bringing up of their eleven children in the hands of Providence, who in turn had left them quite as complacently to the care of the gutter.

"I don't know but what too much trust in the Lord don't work as badly as too little," observed the fish dealer, while John went on placidly arranging his

turnips and carrots. "What appears to me to be the best religion for a working-man is to hold a kind of middle strip between faith and downright disbelievin'. Let yo' soul trust to the Lord's lookin' arter you, but never let yo' hands get so much as an inklin' that you're a-trustin'. Yes, the safest way is to believe in the Lord on Sunday, an' on Monday to go to work as if you wa'nt quite so sartain-sure."

A long finger of sunshine stretched from beyond the chimneys across the street, and pointed straight to the vegetables on John Chitling's counter, until the onions glistened like silver balls, and the turnips and carrots sent out flashes of dull red and bright orange.

"I'll let you overhaul a barrel of apples, sonny," said the big man to me; "have you got a sharp eye for specks?"

When I replied that I thought I had, he pointed to a barrel from which the top had been recently knocked. "They're to be sorted in piles, according to size," he explained, and added, "For such is the contrariness of human nature that there are some folks as can't see the apple for the speck, an' others that would a long ways rather have the speck than the apple. I've one old gentleman for a customer who can't enjoy eatin' a pippin unless he can find one with a spot that won't keep till to-morrow."

Kneeling down on the bricks, as he directed, I sorted the yellow apples until, growing presently faint from hunger, I began to gaze longingly, I suppose, at the string of fish hanging above my head.

"Maybe you'd like to run across an' get a bite of

somethin' befo' you go on," suggested John, reading my glances.

But I only shook my head, in spite of my gnawing stomach, and went on doggedly with my sorting, impelled by an inherent determination to do with the best of me whatever I undertook to do at all. To the possession of this trait, I can see now in looking back, I have owed any success or achievement that has been mine — neither to brains nor to chance, but simply to that instinct to hold fast which was bred in my bone and structure. For the lack of this quality I have seen men with greater intellects, with far quicker wits than mine, go down in the struggle. Brilliancy I have not, nor any particular outward advantage, except that of size and muscle; but when I was once in the race, I could never see to right or to left of me, only straight ahead to the goal.

Overhead the sun had risen slowly higher, until the open spaces and the brick arches were flooded with light. If I had turned I should have seen the gay vegetable stalls blooming like garden beds down the dim length of the building. The voices of the market men floated toward me, now quarrelling, now laughing, now raised to shout at a careless negro or a prowling dog. I heard the sounds, and I smelt the strong smell of fish from the gleaming strings of perch and mackerel hanging across the way. But through it all I did not look up and I did not turn. My first piece of work was done with the high determination to do it well, and it has been my conviction from that morning that if I had slighted that barrel of apples, I should have failed inevitably in my career.

CHAPTER VI

CONCERNING CARROTS

When I had finished my work, I rose from my knees and stood waiting for John Chitling's directions.

"Run along to the next street," he said kindly, "an' you can tell my house, I reckon, by the number of children in the gutter. It's the house with the most children befo' it. You'll find my wife cookin', likely enough, in the kitchen, an' all you've got to say is that I told you to tell her that you were hungry. She won't ax you many questions, — that ain't her way, — but she'll jest set to work an' feed you."

Reassured by this description, I whistled to Samuel, and crossed the narrow street, crowded with farmers' wagons and empty wheelbarrows, to a row of dingy houses, with darkened basements, which began at the corner. By the number of ragged and unwashed children playing among the old tin cans in the gutter before the second doorway, I concluded that this was the home of John Chitling; and I was about to enter the close, dimly lighted passage, when a chorus of piercing screams from the small Chitlings outside, brought before me a large, slovenly woman, with slip-shod shoes, and a row of curl papers above her forehead. When she reached the doorway, a small crowd had already gathered upon the pavement, and I beheld a half-naked urchin of a year or thereabouts,

dangled, head downwards, by the hand of a passing milkman.

"The baby's gone an' swallowed a cent, ma," shrieked a half-dozen treble voices.

"Well, the Lord be praised that it wa'nt a quarter!" exclaimed Mrs. Chitling, with a cheerful piety, which impressed me hardly less than did the placid face with which she gazed upon the howling baby. "There, there, it ain't near so bad as it might have been. Don't scream so, Tommy, a cent won't choke him an' a quarter might have."

"But it was *my cent*, an' I ain't got a quarter!" roared Tommy, still unconsoled.

"Well, I'll give you a quarter when my ship comes in," responded his mother, at which the grief of the small financier began gradually to subside.

"I had it right in my hand," he sniffled, with his knuckles at his eyes, "an' I jest put it into the baby's mouth for keepin'."

By this time Mrs. Chitling had received the baby into her arms, and turning with an unruffled manner, she bore him into the house, where she stopped his mouth with a spoonful of blackberry jam. As she replaced the jar on the shelf she looked down, and for the first time became aware of my presence.

"He ain't swallowed anything of yours, has he?" she enquired. "If he has you'll have to put the complaint in writing because the neighbours are al'ays comin' to me for the things that are inside of him. I've never been able to shake anything out of him," she added placidly, "except one of Mrs. Haskin's bugle beads."

She delivered this with such perfect amiability that I was emboldened to say in my politest manner, "If you please, ma'am, Mr. Chitling told me I was to say that he said that I was hungry."

"So the baby really ain't took anything of yours?" she asked, relieved. "Well, I al'ays said he didn't do half the damage they accused him of."

As I possessed nothing except the clothes in which I stood, and even that elastic urchin could hardly have accommodated these, I hastened to assure her that I was the bearer of no complaint. This appeared to win her entirely, and her large motherly face beamed upon me beneath the aureole of curl papers that radiated from her forehead. With a single movement she cleared a space on the disorderly kitchen table and slapped down a plate, with a piece missing, as if the baby had taken a bite out of it.

"To think of yo' goin' hungry at yo' age an' without a mother," she said, opening a safe, and whipping several slices of bacon and a couple of eggs into a skillet. "Why, it would make me turn in my grave if I thought of one of my eleven wantin' a bite of meat an' not havin' it."

As she switched about in her cheerful, slovenly way, I saw that her skirt had sagged at the back into what appeared to be an habitual gap, and from beneath it there showed a black calico petticoat of a dingy shade. But when a little later she sat me at the table, with Samuel's breakfast on the floor beside me, I forgot her slatternly dress, her halo of curl papers, and her slipshod shoes, while I plied my fork and my fingers under the motherly effulgence of her smile. Tied into

a high chair in one corner, the baby sat bolt upright, with his thumb in his mouth, deriving apparently the greatest enjoyment from watching my appetite; and before I had finished, the ten cheerful children trooped in and gathered about me. "Give him another cake, ma!" "It's my turn to help him next, ma!" "I'll pour out his coffee for him!" "Oh, ma, let me feed the dog," rose in a jubilant chorus of shrieks.

"An' he ain't got any mother!" roared Tommy suddenly, and burst into tears.

A sob lodged in my throat, but before the choking sound of it reached my ears, I felt myself enfolded in Mrs. Chitling's embrace. As I looked up at her from this haven of refuge, it seemed to me that her curl papers were transfigured into a halo, and that her face shone with a heavenly beauty.

I was given a bed in the attic, with the six younger Chitlings, and two days later, when my father tracked me to my hiding-place, I hid under the dark staircase in the hall, and heard my protector deliver an eloquent invective on the subject of stepmothers. It was the one occasion in my long acquaintance with her when I saw her fairly roused out of her amiable inertia. Albemarle, the baby, had spilled bacon gravy over her dress that very morning, and I had heard her console him immediately with the assurance that there was "a plenty more in the dish." But possessed though she was with that peculiar insight which discerns in every misfortune a hidden blessing, in stepmothers, I found, and in stepmothers alone, she could discern nothing except sermons.

"To think of yo' havin' the brazen impudence to

come here arter the harm you've done that po' defenceless darling boy," she said, with a noble dignity which obscured somehow her slovenly figure and her dirty kitchen. Peering out from under the staircase, I could see that my father stood quite humbly before her, twirling his hatbrim nervously in his hands.

"I ax you to believe, mum, what is the gospel truth," he replied, "that I wa'nt meanin' any harm to Benjy."

"Not meanin' any harm an' you brought him a stepmother befo' six months was up?" she cried. "Well, that ain't *my* way of lookin' at it, for I've a mother's heart and it takes a mother's heart to stand the tricks of children," she added, glancing down at the gravy stains on her bosom, "an' it ain't to be supposed — is it? — that a stepmother should have a mother's heart? It ain't natur — is it? — I put it to you, that any man or woman should be born with a natchel taste for screamin' an' kickin' an' bein' splashed with gravy, an' the only thing that's goin' to cultivate them tastes in anybody is bringin' ten or eleven of 'em into the world. Lord, suh, I wa'nt born with the love of dirt an' fussin' any mo' than you. It just comes along o' motherhood like so much else. Now it stands to reason that you ain't goin' to enjoy the trouble a child makes unless that child is your own. Why, what did my baby do this mornin' when he was learnin' to walk, but catch holt of the dish an' bring all the gravy down over me. Is thar any livin' soul, I ax you plainly, expected to see the cuteness in a thing like that except a mother? An' what I say is that unless you can see the cuteness in a child

instead of the badness, you ain't got no business to bring 'em up — no, not even if you are the President himself! —"

Just here I distinctly heard my father murmur in his humble voice something about having named an infant after the office and not the man. But so brief was the pause in Mrs. Chitling's flow of remonstrance that his interjection was overwhelmed almost before it was uttered. Her very slovenliness, expressing as it did what she had given up rather than what she was, served in a measure to increase the solemn majesty with which she spoke; and I gathered easily that my father's small wits were vanquished by the first charge of her impassioned rhetoric.

"I thank you kindly, mum, it is all jest as you say," he replied, with the submissiveness of utter defeat, "but, you see, a man has got to give a thought to his washin'. It stands to reason — don't it?" — he concluded with a flash of direct inspiration, "that thar ain't any way to get a woman to wash free for you except to marry her."

The logic of this appeared to impress even Mrs. Chitling, for she hesitated an instant before replying, and when she finally spoke, I thought her tone had lost something of its decision.

"An' to make it worse you took a yaller-headed one an' they're the kind that gad," she retorted feebly.

My father shook his head, while a stubborn expression settled on his sheepish features.

"Thar's the cookin' an' the washin' for her to think of," he said. "I ain't got any use for a woman that ain't satisfied with the pleasures of home."

"The moral kind are, Mr. Starr," rejoined Mrs. Chitling, who had relapsed into a condition of placid indolence. "An' as far as I am concerned since the first of my eleven came, I've never wanted to put on my bonnet an' set foot outside that do'. My kitchen is my kingdom," she added, with dignity, "an' for my part, I ain't got any use for those women who are everlastingly standin' up for thar rights. What does a woman want with rights, I say, when she can enjoy all the virtues? What does she want to be standin' up for anyway as long as she can set?"

"Thar's no doubt that it is true, mum," rejoined my father; and when he took his leave a few minutes afterwards, their relations appeared to have become extremely friendly, — not to say confidential. For an instant I trembled in my hiding-place, half expecting to be delivered into his hands. But he departed at last without discovering me, and I emerged from the darkness and stood before Mrs. Chitling, who had begun absent-mindedly to take down her curl papers.

"Most likely it ain't his fault arter all," she observed, for her judgment of him had already become a part of the general softness and pliability of her criticism of life; "he seems to be a nice sensible body with proper ideas about women. I like a man that knows a woman's place, an' I like a woman that knows it, too. Yo' ma was a decent, sober, hard-workin' person, wa'nt she, Benjy?"

I replied that she was always in her kitchen and generally in her washtub, except when she went to funerals.

"Well, I ain't any moral objection to a funeral now

an' then, or some other sober kind of entertainment," returned Mrs. Chitling, removing her curl papers in order to put on fresh ones, "but what I say is that the woman who wants pleasure outside her do' ain't the woman that she ought to be, that's all. What can she have, I ax, any mo' than she's got? Ain't she got everything already that the men don't want? Ain't sweetness an' virtue, an' patience an' long suffering an' childbearin' enough for her without her impudently standin' up in the face of men an' axin' for mo'? Had she rather have a vote than the respect of men, an' ain't the respect of men enough to fill any honest female's life?"

In the beginning of her discourse, she had turned aside to slap a portion of cornmeal into a cracked yellow bowl, and after pouring a little water out of a broken dipper, she began whipping the dough with a long, irregular stroke that scattered a shower of fine drops at every revolution of her hand. Two of the children had got into a fight over a basin of apple parings, and she left her yellow bowl and separated them with a hand that bestowed a patch of wet meal on the hair of one and on the face of another. Not once did she hasten her preparations or relinquish the cheerful serenity which endowed her large, loose figure with a kind of majesty.

The next day I started in as general assistant and market boy to John Chitling, and when I was not sorting over ripe vegetables or barrels of apples fresh from the orchard, I was toiling up the long hill, with a split basket, containing somebody's marketing, on my arm. By degrees I learned the names of John

Chitling's patrons, the separate ways to their houses, which always seemed divided by absurd distances, and the faces of the negro cooks who met me at the kitchen steps and relieved me of my burden. In the beginning I was accompanied on my rounds by a fat, smudge-nosed youth some six or eight years my senior, who smoked vile tobacco and enlivened the way by villainous abuses of John Chitling and the universe. For the first months, I fear, my outlook upon the customers I served was largely coloured by his narratives, but when at last he dropped off and went on a new job at the butcher's, I arrived gradually at a more correct, and certainly a more charitable, point of view. By the end of the winter I had ceased to believe that John Chitling was a skinflint and his customers all vipers.

In the bright soft weather of that spring the city opened into a bloom of faint pink and white, which comes back to me like a delicate fragrance. The old gardens are gone now, with their honeysuckle arbours, their cleanly swept walks, bordered by rows of miniature box, their deep, odorous bowers of microphylla and musk cluster roses. Yet I can look back still through the gauzy shadows of elms and sycamores; I can hear still the rich, singing call of the negro drivers, as the covered wagons from country farms passed sleepily through the hot sunshine which fell between the arching trees; and I can smell again the air steeped in a fragrance that is less that of flowers than of the subtle atmosphere of an unforgettable youth. To-day the city is the same city no longer, nor is the man who writes this the market boy who toiled up the long hill in the blossoming spring,

with the seeds of the future quickening in brain and heart.

The morning that I remember best is the one on which I carried the day's marketing to an old grey house, with beds of wallflowers growing close against the stuccoed bricks, and a shrub that flowered bright yellow glancing through the tall gate at the rear. I had passed the wallflowers as was my custom, and entering the gate at the back, had delivered my basket at the kitchen door, when, as I turned to retrace my steps, I was detained by the scolding voice of the pink-turbaned negro cook.

"Hi! if you ain' clean furgit de car'ots!" she cried.

Now the carrots had been placed in the basket, as I had seen with my own eyes, by the hands of John Chitling himself, and I had been cautioned at the time not to drop them out in my ascent of the steep hill. There was a lady in the grey house, he had informed me, who was supposed to subsist upon carrots alone, and who was in consequence extremely particular as to their size and flavour.

"Are you sure they ain't among the vegetables?" I asked. "I saw them put in myself."

"Huh! en you seed 'em fall out, too, I lay!" rejoined the negress, protruding her thick red lips as she turned the basket upside down with an indignant blow.

"If they're lost, I'll go back and bring others," I said, thinking disconsolately of the hill.

"En you 'ould be back hyer agin in time fur supper," retorted the outraged divinity. "Wat you reckon Miss Mitty wants wid car'ots fur 'er supper? Dey is

hern, dey ain' mine, but ef'n dey 'us mine I'd lamn you twel you couldn't see ter set. Hit's bad enough ter hev ter live erlong in de same worl' wid de slue-footed po' white trash widout hevin' dem a-snatchin' de car'ots outer yo' ve'y mouf."

My temper, never of the mildest, was stung quickly to a retort, and I was about to order her to hold her tongue and return me my basket, when the door into the house opened and shut, and the little girl of the enchanted garden appeared in the flesh before me.

"I want the plum cake you promised me, Aunt Mirabella," she cried; "and oh! I hope you've stuffed it full of plums!" Then her glance fell upon me and I saw her thick black eyebrows arch merrily over her sparkling grey eyes. "It's my boy! My dear common boy!" she exclaimed, with a rush toward me. For the first time I noticed then that she was dressed in mourning, and that her black clothes intensified the dark brightness of her look. "Oh, I *am* glad to see you," she added, seizing my hand.

I gazed up at her, wounded rather than pleased "I shan't be a common boy always," I answered.

"Do you mind my calling you one? If you do, I won't," she said, and without waiting a minute, "What are you doing here? I thought you lived over on Church Hill."

"I don't now. Ma died and I ran away."

"My mother died, too," she returned softly, "and then grandmama."

For a moment there was a pause. Then I said with a kind of stubborn pride, "I ran away."

The sadness passed from her and she turned on me

in a glow of animation. "Oh, I should just love dearly to run away!" she exclaimed.

"You couldn't. You're a girl."

"I could, too, if I chose."

"Then why don't you choose?"

"Because of Aunt Mitty and Aunt Matoaca. They haven't anybody but me."

"I left my father," I replied proudly, "and I didn't care one single bit. That's the trouble with girls. They're always caring."

"Well, I'm not caring for you," she retorted with crushing effect, shaking back the soft cloud of hair on her shoulders.

"Boys don't care," I rejoined with indifference, taking up my market basket.

She detained me with a glance. "There's one thing they care about — dreadfully," she said.

"No, there ain't."

Without replying in words she went over to the stove, and standing on tiptoe, gingerly removed a hot plum cake, small and round and shaped like a muffin, from the smoking oven.

"I reckon they care about plum cake," she remarked tauntingly, and as she held it toward me it smelt divinely.

But my pride was in arms, for I remembered the cup of milk she had refused disdainfully more than three years ago in our little kitchen.

"No, they don't," I replied with a stoicism that might have added lustre to a nobler cause.

In my heart I was hoping that she would drop the cake into my basket in spite of my protest, not only

sparing my pride by an act of magnanimity, but allowing me at the same time the felicity of munching the plums on my way back to the Old Market. But the next moment, to my surprise and indignation, she took a generous bite of the very dainty she had offered me, making, while she ate it, provoking faces of a rapturous enjoyment.

I was lingering in the doorway with a scornful yet fascinated gaze on the diminishing cake, when the pink-turbaned cook, who had gone out to empty a basin of pea shells, entered and resumed her querulous abuse.

"De bes' thing you kin do is ter clear out," she said, "you en yo' car'ots. He ain' fit'n fur you ter tu'n yo' eyes on, honey," she added to the child, "en I don' reckon yo' ma would let yo' wipe yo' foot on 'im ef'n she 'uz alive. Yes'm, Miss Mitty, I'se a-comin' !"

Her voice rose high in response to a call from the house, but before she could leave the kitchen, the door behind the little girl opened, and a lady said reprovingly: —

"Sally, Sally, haven't I told you to keep away from the kitchen?"

"Oh, Aunt Mitty, I had to come for my plum cake," pleaded Sally, "and Aunt Matoaca said that I might."

An elderly lady, all soft black and old yellow lace, stood in the doorway. Then before she could answer a second one appeared at her side, and I had a vision of two slender maidenly figures, who reminded me, meek heads, drooping faces, and creamy lace caps, of the wall-flowers in the border outside blooming in a patch of sunshine close against the old grey house. At first there seemed to me to be no visible difference between them,

but after a minute, I saw that the second one was gentler and smaller, with a softer smile and a more shrinking manner.

"It was my fault, Sister Mitty," she said, "I told Sally that she might come after her plum cake."

Her voice was so low and mild that I was amazed the next instant to hear the taller lady respond.

"Of course, Sister Matoaca, you were at liberty to do as you thought right, but I cannot conceal from you that I consider a person of your dangerous views an unsafe guardian for a young girl."

She advanced a step into the kitchen, and as Miss Matoaca followed her she replied in an abashed and faltering voice: —

"I am sorry, Sister Mitty, that we do not agree in our principles. There is nothing else that I will not sacrifice to you, but when a question of principle is concerned, however painful it is to me, I must be firm."

At this, while I was wondering what terrible thing a principle could possibly turn out to be, I saw Miss Mitty draw herself up until she fairly towered like a marble column about the shrinking figure in front of her.

"But such principles, Sister Matoaca!" she exclaimed.

A flush rose to the clear brown surface of the little lady's cheek, and more than ever, I thought, she resembled one of the wallflowers in the border outside. Her head, with its shiny parting of soft chestnut hair, was lifted with a mild, yet spirited gesture, and I saw the delicate lace at her throat and wrists tremble as if a faint wind had passed.

"Remember, sister, that my ancestors as well as yours fought against oppression in three wars," she

said in her sweet low voice that had, to my ears, the sound of a silver bell, "and it has become my painful duty, after long deliberation with my conscience, to inform you — I consider that taxation without representation is tyranny."

"Sally, go into the house," commanded Miss Mitty, "I cannot permit you to hear such dangerous sentiments expressed."

"Let me go, Sister Mitty," said Miss Matoaca, for the flash of spirit had left her as wan and drooping as a blighted flower; "I will go myself," and turning meekly, she left the kitchen, while Sally took a second cake from the oven and came over to where I stood.

"I'll just put this into your basket anyway," she remarked, "even if you don't care about it."

"Come, child," urged Miss Mitty, waiting, "but give the boy his cake first."

The cake was put into my hands, not into the basket, and I took a large, delicious mouthful of it while I went by the meek wallflowers standing in a row, like prim maiden ladies, against the old grey house.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH I MOUNT THE FIRST RUNG OF THE LADDER

As I passed through the gate and turned down Franklin Street under a great sycamore that grew midway of the pavement, I vowed passionately in my heart that I would remain "a common boy" no longer. With the plum cake in my hand, and the delicious taste of it in my mouth, I placed my basket on the ground and leaned against the silvery body of the tree, with my eyes on Samuel, sitting very erect, with his paws held up, his tail wagging, and his expectant gaze on my face.

"What can we do about it, Samuel? How can we begin? Are we common to the bone, I wonder? and how are we going to change?"

But Samuel's thoughts were on the last bit of cake, and when I gave it to him, he stopped begging like a wise dog that has what he wanted, and lay down on the sidewalk with his eyes closed and his nose between his outstretched paws.

A gentle wind stirred overhead, and I smelt the sharp sweet fragrance of the sycamore, which cast a delicate lacework of shadows on the crooked brick pavement. Not only the great sycamore and myself and Samuel, but the whole blossoming city appeared to me in a dream; and as I glanced down the quiet street, over

which the large, slow shadows moved to and fro, I saw through a mist the blurred grey-green foliage in the Capitol Square. In the ground the seeds of the new South, which was in truth but the resurrected spirit of the old, still germinated in darkness. But the air, though I did not know it, was already full of the promise of the industrial awakening, the constructive impulse, the recovered energy, that was yet to be, and in which I, leaning there a barefooted market boy, was to have my part.

An aged negress, in a red bandanna turban, with a pipe in her mouth, stopped to rest in the shadow of the sycamore, placing her basket, full of onions and tomatoes, on the pavement beside my empty one.

"Do you know who lives in that grey house, Mammy?" I asked.

Twisting the stem of her pipe to the corner of her mouth, she sat nodding at me, while the wind fluttered the wisps of grizzled hair escaping from beneath her red and yellow head-dress.

"Go 'way, chile, whar you done come f'om?" she demanded suspiciously. "Ain't you ever hyern er Marse Bland? He riz me."

I shook my head, sufficiently humbled by my plebeian ignorance.

"Are the two old ladies his daughters?"

"Wat you call Miss Mitty en Miss Matoaca ole fur? Dey ain' ole," she responded indignantly. "I use'n ter b'long ter Marse Bland befo' de war, en I kin recollect de day dat e'vy one er dem wuz born. Dey's all daid now cep'n Miss Mitty en Miss Matoaca, en Marse Bland he's daid, too."

"Then who is the little girl? Where did she come from?"

There was a dandelion blooming in a tuft of grass between the loosened bricks of the pavement, and I imprisoned it in my bare toes while I waited impatiently for her answer.

"Dat's Miss Sary's chile. She ran away wid Marse Harry Mickleborough, in Marse Bland's lifetime, en he 'ouldn't lay eyes on her f'om dat day ter his deaf. Miss Mitty en Miss Matoaca dey ain' ole, but Miss Sary she want nuttin' mo'n a chile w'en she went off."

"But why did her father never see her again?"

"Dat was 'long er Marse Mickleborough, boy, but I ain' gwine inter de ens en de outs er dat. Hit mought er been becaze er Marse Mickleborough's fiddle, but I ain' sayin' dat hit wuz er dat hit wuzn't. Dar's some folks dat cyarn' stan' de squeak er a fiddle, en he sutney did fiddle a mont'ous lot. He usen ter beat Miss Sary, too, I hyern tell, jes es you mought hev prognosticate er a fiddlin' man; but she ain' never come home twel atter her pa wuz daid en buried over yonder in Hollywood. Den w'en de will wuz read Marse Bland had lef ev'y las' cent clean away f'om her en de chile. Atter Miss Mitty en Miss Matoaca die de hull pa'cel er hit's er gwine ter some no 'count hospital whar dey take live folks ter pieces en den put 'em tergedder agin."

"You mean the little girl won't get a blessed cent?" I asked, and my toes pinched the head of the dandelion until it dropped from its stem.

"Ain't I done tole you how 'tis?" demanded the negress in exasperation, rising from her seat on the

curbing, "en wat mek you keep on axin' over wat I done tole you?"

She went off muttering to herself, while she clenched the stem of her corncob pipe between her toothless gums; and picking up my basket and whistling to Samuel, I walked slowly downhill, with the problem of the future working excitedly in my brain.

"A market boy is obliged to be a common boy," I thought, and immediately: "Then I will not be a market boy any longer."

So hopeless the next instant did my present condition of abject ignorance appear to me, that I found myself regretting that I had not asked advice of the aged negress who had rested beside me in the shadow of the sycamore. I wondered if she would consider the selling of newspapers a less degrading employment than the hawking of vegetables, and with the thought, I saw stretching before me, in all its alluring brightness, that royal road of success which leads from the castle of dreams. One instant I resolved to start life as a fruit vender on the train, and the next I was wildly imagining myself the president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad, with a jingling bunch of seals and a gold-headed stick. When at last I reached the Old Market I found that the gayety had departed from it, and it appeared slovenly and disgusting to my awakened eyes. The fruit and vegetables, so fresh and inviting in the early morning, were now stale and wilted; a swarm of flies hung like a black cloud around the joint suspended before the stall of Perkins, the butcher; and as I passed the stand of the fish dealer, the odour of decaying fish entered my nostrils. Was

it the same place I had left only a few hours before, or what sudden change in myself had revealed to me the grim ugliness of its aspect? "He's a common boy," the little girl had said of me almost four years ago, and I felt now, as I had felt then, the sting of a whip on my bare flesh at her words. Come what might I would cease to be "a common boy" from that hour.

In the afternoon I bought an armful of "The Evening Planet," and wandered up Franklin Street on a venture, crying the papers aloud with an agreeable assurance that I had deserted huckstering to enter journalism. As I passed the garden of the old grey house my voice rang out shrilly, yet with a quavering note in it, "Eve-ning Pla-net!" and almost before the sound had passed under the sycamores, the gate in the wall opened cautiously and one of the ladies called to me timidly with her face pressed to the crack. The two sisters were so much alike that it was a minute before I discovered the one who spoke to be Miss Matoaca.

"Will you please let me have a paper," she said apologetically, "we do not take it. There is no gentleman in the house. I — I am interested in the marriages and deaths," she added, in a louder tone as if some one were standing close to her beyond the garden gate.

As I gave her the paper she stretched out her hand, under its yellowed lace ruffle, and dropped the money into my palm.

"I shall be obliged to you if you will call out every day when you pass here," she remarked, after a minute; "I am almost always in the garden at this hour."

I promised her that I should certainly remember,

and she was about to draw inside the garden with a gentle, flower-like motion of her head, when a gentleman, with a gold-headed walking-stick in his hand, lunged suddenly round the smaller sycamore at the corner, and entrapped her between the wall and the gate before she had time to retreat.

"So I've caught you at it, eh, Miss Matoaca!" he exclaimed, shaking a pudgy forefinger into her face, with an air of playful gallantry. "Buying newspapers!"

Poor Miss Matoaca, fluttering like a leaf before this onslaught of chivalry, could only drop her bright brown eyes to the ground and flush a delicate pink, which the General must have admired.

"They — they are excellent to keep away moths!" she stammered.

The sly and merry look, which I discovered afterwards to be his invincible weapon with the ladies, appeared instantly in his watery grey eyes.

"And you don't even glance at the political headlines? Ah, confess, Miss Matoaca."

He was very stout, very red in the face, very round in the stomach, very roguish in the eyes, yet I realised even then that some twenty years before — when the results of his sportive masculinity had not become visible in his appearance — he must have been handsome enough to have melted even Miss Matoaca's heart. Like a faint lingering beam of autumn sunshine, this comeliness, this blithe and unforgettable charm of youth, still hovered about his heavy and plethoric figure. Across his expansive front there stretched a massive gold chain of a unique pattern.

and from this chain, I saw now, there hung a jingling and fascinating bunch of seals. The gentleman I might have forgotten, but that bunch of seals had occupied for three long years a particular corner of my memory; and in the instant that my eyes fell upon it, I saw again the ragged hill covered with pokeberry, yarrow, and stunted sumach, the anchored vessel outlined against the rosy sunset, and the panting stranger, who had stopped to rest with his hand on my shoulder. I remembered suddenly that I wanted to become the president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad.

He stood there now in all his redundant flesh before me, his large mottled cheeks inflated with laughter, his full red lips pursed into a gay and mocking expression. To me he personified success, happiness, achievement — the other shining extreme from my own obscurity and commonness; but the effect upon poor little Miss Matoaca was quite the opposite, I judged the next minute, from the one that he had intended. I watched her fragile shoulders straighten and a glow rather than a flash of spirit pass into her uplifted face.

"With your record, General Bolingbroke," she said, in a quavering yet courageous voice, "you may refuse your approval, but not your respect, to a matter of principle."

The roguish twinkle, which was still so charming, appeared like the lost spirit of youth in the General's eyes.

"Ah, Miss Matoaca," he rejoined, in his most gallant manner, "principles do not apply to ladies!"

At this Miss Matoaca drew herself up almost haugh-

tily, and I felt as I looked at her that only her sex had kept her from becoming a general herself.

"It is very painful to me to disagree with the gentlemen I know," she said, "but when it is a matter of conviction I feel that even the respect of gentlemen should be sacrificed. My sister Mitty considers me quite indelicate, but I cannot conceal from you that —" her voice broke and dropped, but rose again instantly with a clear, silvery sound, "I consider that taxation without representation is tyranny."

A virgin martyr refusing to sacrifice a dove to Venus might have uttered her costly heresy in such a voice and with such a look; but the General met it suavely with a flourish of his wide-brimmed hat and a blandishing smile. He was one of those gentlemen of the old school, I came to know later, to whom it was an inherent impossibility to appear without affectation in the presence of a member of the opposite sex. A high liver, and a good fellow every inch of him, he could be natural, racy, charming, and without vanity, when in the midst of men; but let so much as the rustle of a petticoat sound on the pavement, and he would begin to strut and plume himself as instinctively as the cock in the barnyard.

"But what would you do with a vote, my dear Miss Matoaca," he protested airily. "Put it into a pie?"

His witticism, which he hardly seemed aware of until it was uttered, afforded him the next instant an enjoyment so hilarious that I saw his waist shake like a bowl of jelly between the flapping folds of his alpaca coat. While he stood there with his large white cravat

twisted awry by the swelling of his crimson neck, and his legs, in a pair of duck trousers, planted very far apart on the sidewalk, he presented the aspect of a man who felt himself to be a graduate in the experimental science of what he probably would have called "the sex." When I heard him frequently alluded to afterwards as "a gay old bird," I wondered that I had not fitted the phrase to him as he fixed his swimming, parrot-like eyes on the flushed face of Miss Matoaca.

"If that's all the use you'd make of it, I think we might safely trust it to you," he observed with a flattering glance. "A woman who can make your mince pies, dear lady, need not worry about her rights."

"How is George, General?" asked Miss Matoaca, with an air of gentle, offended dignity. "I heard he had come to live with you since his mother's death."

"So he has, the rascal," responded the General, "and a nephew under twelve years of age is a severe strain on the habits of an elderly bachelor."

The corners of Miss Matoaca's mouth grew suddenly prim.

"I suppose you could hardly close the door on your sister's orphan son," she observed, in a severer tone than I had yet heard her use.

He sighed, and the sigh appeared to pass in the form of a tremor through his white-trousered legs.

"Ah, that's it," he rejoined. "You ladies ought to be thankful that you haven't our responsibilities. No, no, thank you, I won't come in. My respects to Miss Mitty and to yourself."

The gate closed softly as if after a love tryst, Miss Matoaca disappeared into the garden, and the General's

expression changed from its jocose and smiling flattery to a look of genuine annoyance.

"No, I don't want a paper, boy!" he exclaimed.

With a wave of his gold-headed cane in my direction, he would have passed on his way, but at his first step, happily for me, his toe struck against a loosened brick, and the pain of the shock caused him to bend over and begin rubbing his gouty foot, with an exclamation that sounded suspiciously like an oath. Where was the roguish humour now in the small watery grey eyes? The gout, not "the sex," had him ignominiously by the heel.

"If you please, General, do you remember me?" I enquired timidly.

Still clasping his foot, he turned a crimson glare upon me. "Damnation! — I mean Good Lord, have mercy on my toe, why should I remember you?"

"It was on Church Hill almost four years ago, you promised," I suggested as a gentle spur to his memory.

"And you expect me to remember what I promised four years ago?" he rejoined with a sly twinkle. "Why, bless my soul, you're worse than a woman."

"You asked me, sir, if I wanted to grow up and be President," I returned, not without resentment.

Releasing his ankle abruptly, he stood up and slapped his thigh.

"Great Jehosaphat! If you ain't the little chap who was content to be nothing less than God Almighty!" he exclaimed. "I've told that story a hundred times if I've told it once."

"Then perhaps you'll help me a little, sir," I suggested.

"Help you to become God Almighty?" he chuckled.

"No, sir, help me to be the president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad."

"Then you'll be satisfied with the lesser office, eh?"

"I shall, sir, if — if there isn't anything better."

Again he slapped his thigh and again he chuckled. "But I've got one boy already. I don't want another," he protested. "Good Lord, one is bad enough when he's not your own."

Whether or not he really supposed that I was a serious applicant for adoption, I cannot say, but his face put on immediately an harassed and suffering look.

"Have you ever had a twinge of gout, boy?" he enquired.

"No, sir."

"Then you're lucky — damned lucky. When you go to bed to-night you get down on your knees and thank the Lord that you've never had a twinge of gout. You can even eat a strawberry without feeling it, I reckon?"

I replied humbly that I certainly could if I ever got the chance.

"And yet you ain't satisfied — you're asking to be president of a damned railroad — a boy who can eat a strawberry without feeling it!"

He moved on, limping slightly, and like a small persistent devil of temptation, I kept at his elbow.

"Isn't there anything that you can do for me, sir?" I asked, at the point of tears.

"Do for you? Bless my soul, boy, if I had your joints I shouldn't want anything that anybody could

do for me. Can't you walk, hop, skip, jump, all you want to?"

This was so manifestly unfair that I retorted stubbornly, "But I don't want to."

He glanced down on me with a flicker of his still charming smile.

"Well, you would if you were president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic and had looked into the evening paper," he said.

"Are you president of it still, sir?"

"Eh? eh? You'll be wanting to push me out of my job next, I suppose?"

"I'd like to have it when you are dead, sir," I replied.

But this instead of gratifying the General appeared plainly to annoy him. "There now, you'd better run along and sell your papers," he remarked irritably. "If I give you a dime, will you quit bothering me?"

"I'd rather you'd give me a start, sir, as you promised."

"Good Lord! There you are again! Do you know the meaning of n-u-i-s-a-n-c-e, boy?"

"No, sir."

"Well, ask your teacher the next time you go to school."

"I don't go to school. I work."

"You work, eh? Well, look here, let's see. What do you want of me?"

"I thought you might tell me how to begin. I don't want to stay common."

For a moment his attention seemed fixed on a gold pencil which he had taken from his waistcoat pocket. Then opening his card-case he scribbled a line on a

card and handed it to me. "If you choose you may take that to Bob Brackett at the Old Dominion Tobacco Works, on Twenty-fifth Street, near the river," he said, not unkindly. "If he happens to want a boy, he may give you a job; but remember, I don't promise you that he will want one, — and if he does, it isn't likely he'd make you president on the spot," he concluded, with a chuckle.

Waving a gesture of dismissal he started off at a hobble; then catching the eye of a lady in a passing carriage, he straightened himself, bowed with a gallant flourish of his wide-brimmed hat, and went on with a look of agony but a jaunty pace. As I turned, a minute later, to discover who could have wrought this startling change in the behaviour of the General, an open surrey, the bottom filled with a pink cloud of wild azaleas, stopped at the curbing before the grey house, and the faces of Miss Mitty and Sally shone upon me over the blossoms. The child was coloured like a flower from the sun and wind, and there was a soft dewy look about her flushed cheeks, and her very full red lips. At the corner of her mouth, near her square little chin, a tiny white scar showed like a dimple, giving to her lower lip when she laughed an expression of charming archness. I remember these things now — at the moment there was no room for them in my whirling thoughts.

"Oh!" cried the little girl in a burst of happiness, "there's my boy!"

The next minute she had leaped out of the carriage and was bounding across the pavement. Her arms were filled with azalea, and loosened petals fluttered

like a swarm of pink and white moths around her.

"What are you doing, boy?" she asked. "Where is your basket?"

"It's at the market. I'm selling papers."

"Come, Sally," commanded Miss Mitty, stepping out of the surrey with the rest of the flowers. "You must not stop in the street to talk to people you don't know."

"But I do know him, Aunt Mitty, he brings our marketing."

"Well, come in anyway. You are breaking the flowers."

The strong, heady perfume filled my nostrils, though when I remember it now it changes to the scent of wallflowers, which clings always about my memory of the old grey house, with its delicate lace curtains draped back from the small square window-panes as if a face looked out on the crooked pavement.

"Please, Aunt Mitty, let me buy a paper," begged the child.

"A paper, Sally! What on earth would you do with a paper?"

"Couldn't I roll up my hair in it, Auntie?"

"You don't roll up your hair in newspapers. Here, come in. I can't wait any longer."

Lingering an instant, Sally leaned toward me over the pink cloud of azalea. "I'd just love to play with you and Samuel," she said with the sparkling animation I remembered from our first meeting, "but dear Aunt Mitty has so much pride, you know."

She bent still lower, gave Samuel an impassioned

hug with her free arm, and then turning quickly away ran up the short flight of steps and disappeared into the house. The next instant the door closed sharply after her, and only the small rosy petals fluttering in the wind were left to prove to me that I was really awake and it was not a dream.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH MY EDUCATION BEGINS

THERE was no lingering at kitchen doorways with scolding white-turbaned cooks next morning, for as soon as I had delivered the marketing, I returned the basket to John Chitling, and set out down Twenty-fifth Street in the direction of the river. As I went on, a dry, pungent odour seemed to escape from the pavement beneath and invade the air. The earth was drenched with it, the crumbling bricks, the negro hovels, the few sickly ailantus trees, exuded the sharp scent, and even the wind brought stray wafts, as from a giant's pipe, when it blew in gusts up from the river-bottom. Overhead the sky appeared to hang flat and low as if seen through a thin brown veil, and the ancient warehouses, sloping toward the river, rose like sombre prisons out of the murky air. It was still before the introduction of modern machinery into the factories, and as I approached the rotting wooden steps which led into the largest building, loose leaves of tobacco, scattered in the unloading, rustled with a sharp, crackling noise under my feet.

Inside, a clerk on a high stool, with a massive ledger before him, looked up at my entrance, and stuck his pen behind his ear with a sigh of relief.

"A gentleman told me you might want a boy, sir," I began.

He got down from his stool, and sauntering across the room, took a long drink from a bucket of water that stood by the door.

"What gentleman?" he enquired, as he flirted a few drops on the steps outside, and returned the tin dipper to the rusty nail over the bucket.

I drew out the card, which I had kept carefully wrapped in a piece of brown paper in my trousers' pocket. When I handed it to him, he looked at it with a low whistle and stood twirling it in his fingers.

"The gentleman owns about nine-tenths of the business," he remarked for my information. Then turning his head he called over his shoulder to some one hidden behind the massive ledgers on the desk. "I say, Bob, here's a boy the General's sent along. What'll you do with him?"

Bob, a big, blowzy man, who appeared to be upon terms of intimacy with every clerk in the office, came leisurely out into the room, and looked me over with what I felt to be a shrewd and yet not unkindly glance. "It's the second he's sent down in two weeks," he observed, "but this one seems sprightly enough. What's your name, boy?"

"Ben Starr."

"Well, Ben, what're you good for?"

"'Most anything, sir."

"'Most anything, eh? Well, come along, and I'll put you at 'most anything."

He spoke in a pleasant, jovial tone, which made me adore him on the spot; and as he led me across a dark hall and up a sagging flight of steps, he enquired good-

humouredly how I had met General Bolingbroke and why he had given me his card.

"He's a great man, is the General!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm. "When you met him, my boy, you met the biggest man in the South to-day."

Immediately the crimson face, the white-trousered legs, the round stomach, and even the gouty toe, were surrounded in my imagination with a romantic halo. "What's he done to make him so big?" I asked.

"Done? Why, he's done everything. He's opened the South, he's restored trade, he's made an honest fortune out of the carpet-baggers. It's something to own nine-tenths of the Old Dominion Tobacco Works, and to be vice-president of the Bonfield Trust Company, but it's a long sight better to be president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad. If you happen to know of a bigger job than that, I wish you'd point it out."

I couldn't point it out, and so I told him, at which he gave a friendly guffaw and led the way in silence up the sagging staircase. At that moment all that had been mere formless ambition in my mind was concentrated into a single burning desire; and I swore to myself, as I followed Bob, the manager, up the dark staircase to the leaf department, that I, too, would become before I died the biggest man in the South and the president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad. The idea which was to possess me utterly for thirty years dropped into my brain and took root on that morning in the heavy atmosphere of the Old Dominion Tobacco Works. From that hour I walked

not aimlessly, but toward a definite end. I might start in life, I told myself, with a market basket, but I would start also with the resolution that out of the market basket the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad should arise. The vow was still on my lips when the large sliding door on the landing swung open, and we entered an immense barnlike room, in which three or four hundred negroes were at work stemming tobacco.

At first the stagnant fumes of the dry leaf mingling with the odours of so many tightly packed bodies, caused me to turn suddenly dizzy, and the rows of shining black faces swam before my eyes in a blur with the brilliantly dyed turbans of the women. Then I gritted my teeth fiercely, the mist cleared, and I listened undisturbed to the melancholy chant which accompanied the rhythmic movements of the lithe brown fingers.

At either end of the room, which covered the entire length and breadth of the building, the windows were shut fast, and on the outside, close against the greenish panes, innumerable flies swarmed like a black curtain. Before the long troughs stretching waist high from wall to wall, hundreds of negroes stood ceaselessly stripping the dry leaves from the stems; and above the soft golden brown piles of tobacco, the blur of colour separated into distinct and vivid splashes of red, blue, and orange. Back and forth in the obscurity these brilliantly coloured turbans nodded like savage flowers amid a crowd of black faces, in which the eyes alone, very large, wide open, and with gleaming white circles around the pupils, appeared to me to be really

alive and human. They were singing as we entered, and the sound did not stop while the manager crossed the floor and paused for an instant beside the nearest worker, a brawny, coal-black negro, with a red shirt open at his throat, on which I saw a strange, jagged scar, running from ear to chest, like the enigmatical symbol of some savage rite I could not understand. Without turning his head at the manager's approach, he picked up a great leaf and stripped it from the stem at a single stroke, while his tremendous bass voice rolled like the music of an organ over the deep piles of tobacco before which he stood. Above this rich volume of sound fluted the piercing thin sopranos of the women, piping higher, higher, until the ancient hymn resolved itself into something that was neither human nor animal, but so elemental, so primeval, that it was like a voice imprisoned in the soil — a dumb and inarticulate music, rooted deep, and without consciousness, in the passionate earth. Over the mass of dark faces, as they rocked back and forth, I saw light shadows tremble, as faint and swift as the shadows of passing clouds, while here and there a bright red or yellow head-dress rose slightly higher than its neighbours, and floated above the rippling mass like a flower on a stream. And it seemed to me as I stood there, half terrified by the close, hot smells and the savage colours, that something within me stirred and awakened like a secret that I had carried shut up in myself since birth. The music grew louder in my ears, as if I, too, were a part of it, and for the first time I heard clearly the words: —

"Christ totes de young lambs in his bosom, bosom,
Christ totes de young lambs in his bosom, bosom,
Christ totes de young lambs in his bosom, bosom,
Fa-ther, de ye-ar-ur Ju-bi-le-e!"

Bob, the manager, picked up a leaf from the nearest trough, examined it carefully, and tossed it aside. The great black negro turned his head slowly toward him, the jagged scar standing out like a cord above the open collar of his red shirt.

"Christ leads de ole sheep by still watah, watah,
Christ leads de ole sheep by still watah, watah,
Christ leads de ole sheep by still watah, watah,
Fa-ther, de ye-ar-ur Ju-bi-le-e!"

"If I were to leave you here an hour what would you do, Ben?" asked the manager suddenly, speaking close to my ear.

I thought for a moment. "Learn to stem tobacco quick'en they do," I replied at last.

"What have you found out since you came in?"

"That you must strip the leaf off clean and throw it into the big trough that slides it downstairs somewhere."

A smile crossed his face. "If I give you a job it won't be much more than running up and down stairs with messages," he said; "that's what a nigger can't do." He hesitated an instant; "but that's the way I began," he added kindly, "under General Bolingbroke."

I looked up quickly, "And was it the way *he* began?"

"Oh, well, hardly. He belongs to one of the old families, you know. His father was a great planter and he started on top."

My crestfallen look must have moved his pity, I

think, for he said as he turned away and we walked down the long room, "It ain't the start that makes the man, youngster, but the man that makes the start."

The doors swung together behind us, and we descended the dark staircase, with the piercing soprano voices fluting in our ears.

> "Christ leads de ole sheep by still watah, watah,
> Christ leads de ole sheep by still watah, watah."

* * * * * *

That afternoon I went home, full of hope, to my attic in the Old Market quarter. Then as the weeks went on, and I took my place gradually as a small laborious worker in the buzzing hive of human industry, whatever romance had attached itself to the tobacco factory, scattered and vanished in the hard, dry atmosphere of the reality. My part was to run errands up and down the dark staircase for the manager of the leaf department, or to stand for hours on hot days in the stagnant air, amid the reeking smells of the big room, where the army of "stemmers" rocked ceaselessly back and forth to the sound of their savage music. In all those weary weeks I had passed General Bolingbroke but once, and by the blank look on his great perspiring face, I saw that my hero had forgotten utterly the incident of my existence. Yet as I turned on the curbing and looked after him, while he ploughed, wiping his forehead, up the long hill, under the leaves of mulberry and catalpa trees, I felt instinctively that my future triumphs would be in a measure the overthrow of the things for which he and his generation had stood. The manager's casual phrase "the old

families," had bred in me a secret resentment, for I knew in my heart that the genial aristocracy, represented by the president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad, was in reality the enemy, and not the friend, of such as I.

The long, hot summer unfolded slowly while I trudged to the factory in the blinding mornings and back again to the Old Market at the suffocating hour of sunset. Over the doors of the negro hovels luxuriant gourd vines hung in festoons of large fan-shaped leaves, and above the high plank fences at the back, gaudy sunflowers nodded their heads to me as I went wearily by. The richer quarter of the city had blossomed into a fragrant bower, but I saw only the squalid surroundings of the Old Market, with its covered wagons, its overripe melons, its prowling dogs hunting in refuse heaps, and beyond this the crooked street, which led to the tobacco factory and then sagged slowly down to the river-bottom. Sometimes I would lean from my little window at night into the stifling atmosphere, where the humming of a mosquito, or the whirring of a moth, made the only noise, and think of the enchanted garden lying desolate and lovely under the soft shining of the stars. Were the ghosts moving up and down the terraces in the mazes of scented box, I wondered? Then the garden would fade far away from me into a cool, still distance, while I knelt with my head in my hands, panting for breath in the motionless air. Outside the shadow of the Old Market lay over all, stretching sombre and black to where I crouched, a lonely, half-naked child at my attic window. And so at last, bathed in sweat, I would fall asleep, to awaken at dawn

when the covered wagons passed through the streets below, and the cry of "Wa-ter-mil-lion! Wa-ter-mil-lion!" rang in the silence. Then the sun would rise slowly, the day begin, and Mrs. Chitling's cheerful bustle would start anew. Tired, sleepless, despairing, I would set off to work at last, while the Great South Midland Railroad receded farther and farther into the dim province of inaccessible things.

After a long August day, when the factory had shut down while it was yet afternoon, I crept up to Church Hill, and looked again over the spiked wall into the enchanted garden. It was deserted and seemed very sad, I thought, for its only tenants appeared to be the swallows that flew, with short cries, in and out of the white columns. On the front door a large sign hung, reading "For Sale"; and turning away with a sinking heart, I went on to Mrs. Cudlip's in the hope of catching a glimpse of baby Jessy, whom I had not seen since I ran away. She was playing on the sidewalk, a pretty, golden-haired little girl, with the melting blue eyes of my father; and when she caught sight of me, she gave a gurgling cry and ran straight to me out of the arms of President, who, I saw to my surprise, was standing in the doorway of our old home. He was taller than my father now, with the same kind, sheepish face, and the awkward movements as of an overgrown boy.

"Wall, if it ain't Benjy!" he exclaimed, his slow wits paralysed by my unexpected appearance. "If it ain't Benjy!"

Turning aside he spat a wad of tobacco into the gutter, and then coming toward me, seized both my hands and wrung them in his big fists with a grip that hurt.

"You're comin' along now, ain't you, Benjy?" he inquired proudly.

"Tith my Pethedent," lisped baby Jessy at his knees, and he stooped from his great height and lifted her in his arms with the gentleness of a woman.

"What about an eddication, Benjy boy?" he asked over the golden curls.

"I can't get an education and work, too," I answered, "and I've got to work. How's pa?"

"He's taken an awful fondness to the bottle," replied President, with a sly wink, "an' if thar's a thing on earth that can fill a man's thoughts till it crowds out everything else in it, it's the bottle. But speakin' of an eddication, you see I never had one either, an' I tell you, when you don't have it, you miss it every blessed minute of yo' life. Whenever I see a man step on ahead of me in the race, I say to myself, 'Thar goes an eddication. It's the eddication in him that's a-movin' an' not the man.' You mark my words, Benjy, I've stood stock still an' seen 'em stridin' on that didn't have one bloomin' thing inside of 'em except an eddication."

"But how am I to get it, President?" I asked dolefully. "I've got to work."

"Get it out of books, Benjy. It's in 'em if you only have the patience to stick at 'em till you get it out. I never had on o'count of my eyes and my slowness, but you're young an' peart an' you don't get confused by the printed letters."

Diving into his bulging pockets, he took out a big leather purse, from which he extracted a dollar and handed it to me. "Let that go toward an eddication,"

he said, adding: "If you can get it out of books I'll send you a dollar toward it every week I live. That's a kind of starter, anyway, ain't it?"

I replied that I thought it was, and carefully twisted the money into the torn lining of my pocket.

"I'm goin' back to West Virginy to-night," he resumed. "Arter I've seen you an' the little sister thar ain't any use my hangin' on out of work."

"Have you got a good place, President?"

"As good as can be expected for a plain man without an eddication," he responded sadly, and a half hour later, when I said good-by to him, with a sob, he came to the brow of the hill, with little Jessy clinging to his hand, and called after me solemnly, "Remember, Benjy boy, what you want is an eddication!"

So impressed was I by the earnestness of this advice, that as I went back down the dreary hill, with its musty second-hand clothes' shops, its noisy barrooms, and its general aspect of decay and poverty, I felt that my surroundings smothered me because I lacked the peculiar virtue which enabled a man to overcome the adverse circumstances in which he was born. The hot August day was drawing to its end, and the stagnant air in which I moved seemed burdened with sweat until it had become a tangible thing. The gourd vines were hanging limp now over the negro hovels, as if the weight of the yellow globes dragged them to the earth; and in the small square yards at the back, the wilted sunflowers seemed trying to hide their scorched faces from the last gaze of a too ardent lover. Whole families had swarmed out into the streets, and from time to time I stepped over a negro urchin, who lay

flat on his stomach, drinking the juice of an overripe watermelon out of the rind. Above the dirt and squalor the street cries still rang out from covered wagons which crawled ceaselessly back and forth from the country to the Old Market. "Wa-ter-mil-lion. Wa-ter-mil-l-i-o-n! Hyer's yo' Wa-ter-mil-lion fresh f'om de vi-ne!" And as I shut my eyes against the dirt, and my nostrils against the odours, I saw always in my imagination the enchanted garden, with its cool sweet magnolias and laburnums, and its great white columns from which the swallows flew, with short cries, toward the sunset.

A white shopkeeper and a mulatto woman had got into a quarrel on the pavement, and turning away to avoid them, I stumbled by accident into the open door of a second-hand shop, where the proprietor sat on an old cooking-stove drinking a glass of beer. As I started back my frightened glance lit on a heap of dusty volumes in one corner, and in reply to a question, which I put the next instant in a trembling voice, I was informed that I might have the whole pile for fifty cents, provided I'd clear them out on the spot. The bargain was no sooner clinched than I gathered the books in my arms and staggered under their weight in the direction of Mrs. Chitling's. Even for a grown man they would have made a big armful, and when at last I toiled up to my attic, and dropped on my knees by the open window, I was shaking from head to foot with exhaustion. The dust was thick on my hands and arms, and as I turned them over eagerly by the red light of the sunset, the worm-eaten bindings left queer greenish stains on my fingers. Among a number of loose magazines called *The Farmer's Friend*, I found an illus-

trated, rather handsome copy of "Pilgrim's Progress," presented, as an inscription on the flyleaf testified, to one Jeremiah Wakefield as a reward for deportment; the entire eight volumes of "Sir Charles Grandison"; a complete Johnson's Dictionary, with the binding missing; and Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy" in faded crimson morocco. When I had dusted them carefully on an old shirt, and arranged them on the three-cornered shelf at the head of my cot, I felt, with a glow of satisfaction, that the foundations of that education to which President had contributed were already laid in my brain. If the secret of the future had been imprisoned in those mouldy books, I could hardly have attacked them with greater earnestness; and there was probably no accident in my life which directed so powerfully my fortunes as the one that sent me stumbling into that second-hand shop on that afternoon in mid-August. I can imagine what I should have been if I had never had the help of a friend in my career, but when I try to think of myself as unaided by Johnson's Dictionary, or by "Sir Charles Grandison," whose prosiest speeches I committed joyfully to memory, my fancy stumbles in vain in the attempt. For five drudging years those books were my constant companions, my one resource, and to conceive of myself without them is to conceive of another and an entirely different man. If there was harm in any of them, which I doubt, it was clothed to appeal to an older and a less ignorant imagination than mine; and from the elaborate treatises on love melancholy in Burton's "Anatomy," I extracted merely the fine aromatic flavour of his quotations.

CHAPTER IX

I LEARN A LITTLE LATIN AND A GREAT DEAL OF LIFE

My opportunity came at last when Bob Brackett, the manager of the leaf department, discovered me one afternoon tucked away with the half of Johnson's Dictionary in a corner of the stemming room, where the negroes were singing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."

"I say, Ben, why ain't you out on the floor?" he asked.

I laid the book face downwards on the window-sill, and came out, embarrassed and secretive, to where he stood. "I just dropped down there a minute ago to rest," I replied.

"You weren't resting, you were reading. Show me the book."

Without a word I handed him the great dictionary, and he fingered the dog-eared pages with a critical and reflective air.

"Holy Moses! it ain't a blessed thing except words!" he exclaimed, after a minute. "Do you mean to tell me you can sit down and read a dictionary for the pure pleasure of reading?"

"I wasn't reading, I was learning," I answered.

"Learning how?"

"Learning by heart. I've already got as far as the *d*'s."

"You mean you can say every last word of them *a*'s, *b*'s, and *c*'s straight off?"

I nodded gravely, my hands behind my back, my eyes on the beams in the ceiling. "As far as the *d*'s."

"And you're doing all this learning just to get an education, ain't you?"

My eyes dropped from the beams and I shook my head. "I don't believe it's there, sir."

"What? Where?"

"I don't believe an education is in them. I did once."

For a moment he stood turning over the discoloured leaves without replying. "I reckon you can tell me the meaning of 'most any word, eh, Ben?" he demanded.

"Not unless it begins with *a*, *b*, or *c*, sir."

"Well, any word beginning with an *a*, then, that's something. There're a precious lot of 'em. How about allelujah, how's that for a mouthful?"

Instinctively my eyes closed, and I began my reply in a tone that seemed to chime in with the negro's melody.

"'Falsely written for Hallelujah, a word of spiritual exultation, used in hymns; signifies, *Praise God. He will set his tongue, to those pious divine strains; which may be a proper prœludium to those allelujahs, he hopes eternally to sing.*

"'*Government of the Tongue.*'"

"Hooray! That's a whopper!" he exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "What's a præ-lu-di-um?"

"I told you I hadn't got to *p*'s yet," I returned, not without resentment.

The hymn changed suddenly; the negro in the red shirt, with the scar on his neck, turned his great oxlike

eyes upon me, and the next instant his superb voice rolled, rich and deep, as the sound of an organ, from his bared black chest.

"A-settin' in de kingdom,
Y-e-s, m-y-L-a-w-d!"

"Well, you've got gumption," said Bob, the manager. "That's what I always lacked — just plain gumption, and when you ain't got it, there's nothing to take its place. I was talking to General Bolingbroke about you yesterday, Ben, and that's what I said. 'There's but one word for that boy, General, and it's gumption.'"

I accepted the tribute with a swelling heart. "What good will it do me if I can't get an education?" I demanded.

"It's that will give it to you, Ben. Why, don't you know every blessed word in the English language that begins with an *a*? That's more than I know — that's more, I reckon," he burst out, "than the General himself knows!"

In this there was comfort, if a feeble one. "But there're so many other things besides the *a*'s that you've got to learn," I responded.

"Yes, but if you learn the *a*'s, you'll learn the other things, — now ain't that logic? The trouble with me, you see, is that I learned the other things without knowing a blamed sight of an *a*. I tell you what I'll do, Ben, my boy, I'll speak to the General about it the very next time he comes to the factory."

He gave me back the dictionary, and I applied myself to its pages with a terrible earnestness while I awaited the great man's attention.

It was a week before it came, for the General, having gone North on affairs of the railroad, did not condescend to concern himself with my destiny until the more important business was arranged and despatched. Being in a bland mood, however, upon his return, it appeared that he had listened and expressed himself to some purpose at last.

"Tell him to go to Theophilus Pry and let me have his report," was what he had said.

"But who is Theophilus Pry?" I enquired, when this was repeated to me by Bob Brackett.

"Dr. Theophilus Pry, an old friend of the General's, who takes his nephew to coach in the evenings. The doctor's very poor, I believe, because they say of him that he never refuses a patient and never sends a bill. He swears there isn't enough knowledge in his profession to make it worth anybody's money."

"And where does he live?"

"In that little old house with the office in the yard on Franklin Street. The General says you're to go to him this evening at eight o'clock."

The sound of my beating heart was so loud in my ears that I hurriedly buttoned my jacket across it. Then as if I were to be examined on Johnson's Dictionary, my lips began to move silently while I spelled over the biggest words. If I could only confine my future conversations to the use of the *a*'s and *b*'s, I felt that I might safely pass through life without desperate disaster in the matter of speech.

It was a mild October evening, with a smoky blue haze, through which a single star shone over the clipped box in Dr. Theophilus Pry's garden, when I opened the

iron gate and went softly along the pebbled walk to the square little office standing detached from the house. A black servant, carrying a plate of waffles from the outside kitchen, informed me in a querulous voice that the doctor was still at supper, but I might go in and wait; and accepting the suggestion with more amiability than accompanied it, I entered the small, cheerful room, where a lamp, with a lowered wick, burned under a green shade. Around the walls there were many ancient volumes in bindings of stout English calf, and on the mantelpiece, above which hung one of the original engravings of Latane's "Burial," two enormous glass jars, marked "Calomel" and "Quinine," presided over the apartment with an air of medicinal solemnity. They were the only visible and positive evidence of the doctor's calling in life, and when I knew him better in after years, I discovered that they were the only drugs he admitted to a place in the profession of healing. To the day of his death, he administered these alternatives with a high finality and an imposing presence. It was told of him that he considered but one symptom, and this he discovered with his hand on the patient's pulse and his eyes on a big loud-ticking watch in a hunting case. If the pulse was quick, he prescribed quinine, if sluggish, he ordered calomel. To dally with minor ailments was as much beneath him as to temporise with modern medicine. In his last years he was still suspicious of vaccination, and entertained a profound contempt for the knife. Beyond his faith in calomel and quinine, there were but two articles in his creed; he believed first in cleanliness, secondly in God. "Madam," he is reported to have remarked irreverently

to a mother whom he found praying for her child's recovery in the midst of a dirty house, "when God doesn't respond to prayer, He sometimes answers a broom and a bucket of soapsuds." Honest, affable, adored, he presented the singular spectacle of a physician who scorned medicine, and yet who, it was said, had fewer deaths and more recoveries to his credit than any other practitioner of his generation. This belief arose probably in the legendary glamour which resulted from his boundless, though mysterious, charities; for despite the fact that he had until his death a large and devoted following, he lived all his life in a condition of genteel poverty. His single weakness was, I believe, an utter inability to appreciate the exchange value of dollars and cents; and this failing grew upon him so rapidly in his declining years that Mrs. Clay, his widowed sister, who kept his house, was at last obliged to "put up pickles" for the market in order to keep a roof over her brother's distinguished head.

I was sitting in one of the worn leather chairs under the green lamp, when the door opened and shut quickly, and Dr. Theophilus Pry came in and held out his hand.

"So you're the lad George was telling me about," he began at once, with a charming, straightforward courtesy. "I hope I haven't kept you waiting many minutes, sir."

He was spare and tall, with stooping shoulders, a hooked nose, bearing a few red veins, and a smile that lit up his face like the flash of a lantern. Everything about his clothes that could be coloured was of a bright, strong red, his cravat, his big silk handkerchief, and the polka dots in his black stockings. "Yes, I like any

colour as long as it's red," he was fond of saying with his genial chuckle.

Bending over the green baize cloth on the table, he pushed away a pile of examination papers, and raised the wick of the lamp.

"So you've started out to learn Dr. Johnson's Dictionary by heart," he observed. "Now by a fair calculation how long do you suppose it will take you?"

I replied with diffidence that it appeared to me now as if it would very likely take me till the Day of Judgment.

"Well, 'tis as good an occupation as most, and a long ways better than some," commented the doctor. "You've come to me, haven't you, because you think you'd like to learn a little Latin?"

"I'd like to learn anything, sir, that will help me to get on."

"What's the business?"

"Tobacco."

"I don't know that Latin will help you much there, unless it aids you to name a blend."

"It — it isn't only that, sir, I — I want an education — not just a common one."

A smile broke suddenly like a beam of light on his face, and I understood all at once why his calomel and his quinine so often cured. At that moment I should have swallowed tar water on faith if he had prescribed it.

"I don't know much about you, my lad," he remarked with a grave, old-fashioned courtesy, which lifted me several feet above the spot of carpet on which I stood, "but a gentleman who starts out to learn old Samuel

Johnson's Dictionary by heart, is a gentleman I'll give my hand to."

With my pulses throbbing hard, I watched him take down a dog-eared Latin Grammar, and begin turning the pages; and when, after a minute, he put a few simple questions to me, I answered as well as I could for the lump in my throat. "It's the fashion now to neglect the classics," he said sadly, "and a man had the impertinence to tell me yesterday that the only use for a dead language was to write prescriptions for sick people in it. But I maintain, and I will repeat it, that you never find a gentleman of cultured and elevated tastes who has not at least a bowing acquaintance with the Latin language. The common man may deride — "

I looked up quickly. "If you please, sir, I'd like to learn it," I broke in with determination.

He glanced at me kindly, secretly flattered, I suspect, by my spontaneous tribute to his eloquence, and the leaves of the Latin Grammar had fluttered open, when the door swung wide with a cheerful bang, and a boy of about my own age, though considerably under my height and size, entered the room.

"I didn't get in from the ball game till an hour ago, doctor," he exclaimed. "Uncle George says please don't slam me if I am late."

Some surface resemblance to my hero of the railroad made me aware, even before Dr. Pry introduced us, that the newcomer was the "young George" of whom I had heard. He was a fresh, high-coloured boy, whose features showed even now a slight forecast of General Bolingbroke's awful redness. Before I looked at him I got a vague impression that he was hand-

some; after I looked at him I began to wonder curiously why he was not? His hair was of a bright chestnut colour, very curly, and clipped unusually close, in order to hide the natural wave of which, I discovered later, he was ashamed. He had pleasant brown eyes, and a merry smile, which lent a singular charm to his face when it hovered about his mouth.

"I say, doctor, I wish you'd let me off to-night. I'll do double to-morrow," he begged, and then turned to me with his pleasant, intimate manner: "Don't you hate Latin? I do. Before Dr. Theophilus began coaching me I went to a woman, and that was worse — she made it so silly. I hate women, don't you?"

"Young George," observed Dr. Theophilus, with sternness, "for every disrespectful allusion to the ladies, I shall give you an extra page of grammar."

"I'm no worse than uncle, doctor. Uncle says —"

"I forbid you to repeat any flippant remarks of General Bolingbroke's, George, and you may tell him so, with my compliments, at breakfast."

Opening his book, he glanced at me gravely over its pages, and the next instant my education in the ancient languages and the finer graces of society commenced.

On that first evening I won a place in the doctor's affections, which, I like to think, I never really lost in the many changes the future brought me. My obsequious respect for dead tongues redeemed, to a great measure, the appalling ignorance I immediately displayed of the merest rudiments of geography and history; and when the time came, I believe it even reconciled him to my bodily stature, which always

appeared to him to be too large to conform to the smaller requirements of society. In my fourteenth year I began to grow rapidly, and his chief complaint of me after this was that I never learned to manage my hands and feet as if they really belonged to me — a failing that I am perfectly aware I was never able entirely to overcome. It would doubtless take the breeding of all the Bolingbrokes, he once informed me, with a sigh, to enable a man to carry a stature such as mine with the careless dignity which might possibly have been attained by a moderate birth and a smaller body.

"Nature has intended you for a prize-fighter, but God has made of you a gentleman," he added, with his fine, characteristic philosophy, which escaped me at the moment; "it is a blessing, I suppose, to be endowed with a healthy body, but if I were you, I should endeavour to keep my members constantly in my mind. It is the next best thing to behaving as if they did not exist."

This was said so regretfully that I hadn't the heart to inform him that my mind, being of limited dimensions, found difficulty in accommodating at one and the same time my bodily members and the Latin language. Even my "Cæsar" caused me less misery at this period than did the problem of the proper disposal of my hands and feet. Do what I would they were hopelessly (by some singular freak of nature) in my way. The breeding of all the Bolingbrokes would have been taxed to its utmost, I believe, to behave for a single instant as if they did not exist.

Except for the embarrassment of my increasing

stature, the years that followed my introduction to Dr. Theophilus, as he was called, stand out in my memory as ones of almost unruffled happiness. The two great jars of calomel and quinine on the mantelpiece became like faces of familiar, beneficent friends; and the dusty bookcases, with their shining rows of old English bindings, formed an appropriate background for the flight of my wildest dreams. To this day those adolescent fancies have never detached themselves from the little office, the scattered bricks of which are now lying in the ruined garden between the blighted yew tree and the uprooted box. I can see them still circling like vague faces around the green lamp, under which Dr. Theophilus sits, with his brown and white pointer, Robin, asleep at his feet. Sometimes there was a saucer of fresh raspberry jam brought in by Mrs. Clay, the widowed sister; sometimes a basket of winesap apples; and once a year, on the night before Christmas, a large slice of fruit cake and a very small tumbler of eggnog. Always there were the cheery smile, the pleasant talk, racy with anecdotes, and the wagging tail of Robin, the pointer.

"A good dog, Ben, this little mongrel of yours," the doctor would say, as he stooped to pat Samuel's head; "but then, all dogs are good dogs. You remember your Plutarch? Now, here's this Robin of mine. I wouldn't take five hundred dollars in my hand for him to-night." At this Robin, the pointer, would lift his big brown eyes, and slip his soft nose into his master's hand. "I wouldn't take five hundred dollars down for him," Dr. Theophilus would repeat with emphasis.

On the nights when our teacher was called out to a patient, as he often was, George Bolingbroke and I would push back the chairs for a game of checkers, or step outside into the garden for a wrestling match, in which I was always the victor. The physical proportions which the doctor lamented, were, I believe, the strongest hold I had upon the admiration of young George. Latin he treated with the same half-playful, half-contemptuous courtesy that I had observed in General Bolingbroke's manner to "the ladies," and even the doctor he regarded as a mixture of a scholar and a mollycoddle. It was perfectly characteristic that one thing, and one thing only, should command his unqualified respect, and this was the possession of the potential power to knock him down.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH I GROW UP

In my eighteenth year, when I had achieved a position and a salary in the tobacco factory, I left the Old Market forever, and moved into a room, which Mrs. Clay had offered to rent to me, in the house of Dr. Theophilus. During the next twelve months my intimacy with young George, who was about to enter the University, led to an acquaintance, though a slight one, with that great man, the General. As the years passed my dream of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad, instead of evaporating, had become fixed in my mind as the fruition of all my toil, the end of all my ambition. I saw in it still, as I had seen in it that afternoon against the rosy sunset and the anchored vessel, the one glorious possibility, the great adventure. The General's plethoric figure, with his big paunch and his gouty toe, had never lost in my eyes the legendary light in which I had enveloped it; and when George suggested to me carelessly one spring afternoon that I should stop by his house and have a look at his uncle's classical library, I felt my cheeks burn, while my heart beat an excited tattoo against my ribs. The house I knew by sight, a grave, low-browed mansion, with a fringe of purple wistaria draping the long porch; and it was under a pendulous shower of blossoms that we

found the General seated with the evening newspaper in his hand and his bandaged foot on a wicker stool. As we entered the gate he was making a face over a glass of water, while he complained fretfully to Dr. Theophilus, who sat in a rocking-chair, with Robin, the pointer, stretched on a rug at his feet.

"I'll never get used to the taste of water, if I live to be a hundred," the great man was saying peevishly. "To save my soul I can't understand why the Lord made anything so darn flat!"

A single lock of hair, growing just above the bald spot on his head, stirred in the soft wind like a tuft of bleached grass, while his lower, slightly protruding lip pursed itself into an angry and childish expression. He was paying the inevitable price, I gathered, for his career as "a gay old bird"; but even in the rebuking glance which Dr. Theophilus now bent upon him, I read the recognition that the president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad must be dosed more sparingly than other men. Under his loose, puffy chin he wore a loose, puffy tie of a magenta shade, in the midst of which a single black pearl reposed; and when he turned his head, the creases in his neck looked like white cords sunk deep in the scarlet flesh.

"There's no use, Theophilus, I can't stand it," he protested. "Delilah, bring me a sip of whiskey to put a taste in my mouth."

"No whiskey, Delilah, not a drop," commanded the doctor sternly. "It's the result of your own imprudence, George, and you've got to pay for it. You've been eating strawberries, and I told you not to touch one with a ten-foot pole."

"You didn't say a word about strawberry shortcake," rejoined the General, like a guilty child, "and this attack is due to an entirely different cause. I dined at the Blands' on Sunday, and Miss Mitty gave me mint sauce on my lamb. I never could abide mint sauce."

Taking out his prescription book the doctor wrote down a prescription in a single word, which looked ominously like "calomel" from a distance.

"How did Miss Matoaca seem?" he asked, while Robin, the old pointer, came and sniffed at my ankles, and I thought of Samuel, sleeping under a flower bed in the doctor's garden. "She has a touch of malaria, and I ordered her three grains of quinine every morning."

A purple flush mounted to the General's face, which, if I could have read it by the light of history, would have explained the scornful flattery in his attitude toward "the sex." It was easy to catch the personal note in his piquant allusions to "the ladies," though an instinct, which he would probably have called a principle, kept them always within the bounds of politeness. Later I was to learn that Miss Matoaca had been the most ardent, if by no means the only, romance of his youth; and that because of some headstrong and indelicate opinions of hers on the subject of masculine morals, she had, when confronted with tangible proofs of the General's airy wanderings, hopelessly severed the engagement within a few weeks of the marriage. To a gay young bird the prospect of a storm in a nest had been far from attractive; and after a fierce quarrel, he had started dizzily down the descent

of his bachelorhood, while she had folded her trembling wings and retired into the shadow. That Miss Matoaca possessed "headstrong opinions," even the doctor, with all his gallantry, would have been the last to deny. "She seems to think men are made just like women," he remarked now, wonderingly, "but, oh, Lord, they ain't!"

"I tell you it's those outlandish heathen notions of hers that are driving us all crazy!" exclaimed the General, making a face as he had done over his glass of water. "Talks about taxes without representation exactly as if she were a man and had rights! What rights does a woman want, anyway, I'd like to know, except the right to a husband? They all ought to have husbands — God knows I'm not denying them that! — the state ought to see to it. But rights! Pshaw! They'll get so presently they won't know how to bear their wrongs with dignity. And I tell you, doctor, if there's a more edifying sight than a woman bearing her wrongs beautifully, I've never seen it. Why, I remember my Cousin Jenny Tyler — you know she married that scamp who used to drink and throw his boots at her. 'What do you do, Jenny?' I asked, in a boiling rage, when she told me, and I never saw a woman look more like an angel than she did when she answered, 'I pick them up.' Why, she made me cry, sir; that's the sort of woman that makes a man want to marry."

"I dare say you're right," sighed the doctor, "but Miss Matoaca is made of a different stuff. I can't imagine her picking up any man's boots, George."

"No more can I," retorted the General, "it serves her

right that she never got a husband. No gentleman wants to throw his boots at his wife, but, by Jove, he likes to feel that if he were ever to do such a thing, she'd be the kind that would pick them up. He doesn't want to think everlastingly that he's got to walk a chalk-line or catch a flea in his ear. Now, what do you suppose Miss Matoaca said to me on Sunday? We were talking of Tom Frost's running for governor, and she said she hoped he wouldn't be elected because he led an impure life. An impure life! Will you tell me what business it is of an unmarried lady's whether a man leads an impure life or not? It isn't ladylike — I'll be damned if it is! I could see that Miss Mitty blushed for her. What's the world coming to, I ask, when a maiden lady isn't ashamed to know that a man leads an impure life?"

He raged softly, and I could see that Dr. Theophilus was growing sterner over his flippancy.

"Well, you're a gay old bird, George," he remarked, "and I dare say you think me something of a prude."

Tearing off a leaf from his prescription book, he laid it on the table, and held out his hand. Then he stood for a minute with his eyes on Robin, who was marching stiffly round a bed of red geraniums near the gate. "It's time to go," he added; "that old dog of mine is getting ready to root up your geraniums."

"You'd better keep a cat," observed the General, "they do less damage."

Young George and I, who had stood in the shadow of the wistaria awaiting the doctor's departure, came forward now, and I made my awkward bow to the General's bandaged foot.

"Any relative of Jack Starr?" he enquired affably as he shook my hand.

I towered so conspicuously above him, while I stood there with my hat in my hand, that I was for a moment embarrassed by my mere physical advantages.

"No, sir, not that I ever heard of," I answered.

"Then you ought to be thankful," he returned peevishly, "for the first time I ever met the fellow he deliberately trod on my toe — deliberately, sir. And now they're wanting to nominate him for governor — but I say they shan't do it. I've no idea of allowing it. It's utterly out of the question."

"Uncle George, I've brought Ben to see your library," interrupted young George at my elbow.

"Library, eh? Are you going to be a lawyer?" demanded the General.

I shook my head.

"A preacher?" in a more reverent voice.

"No, sir, I'm in the Old Dominion Tobacco Works. You got me my first job."

"I got you your job — did I? Then you're the young chap that discovered that blend for smoking. I told Bob you ought to have a royalty on that. Did he give it to you?"

"I'm to have ten per cent of the sales, sir. They've just begun."

"Well, hold on to it — it's a good blend. I tried it. And when you get your ten per cent, put it into the Old South Chemical Company, if you want to grow rich. It isn't everybody I'd give that tip to, but I like the looks of you. How tall are you?"

"Six feet one in my stockings."

"Well, I wouldn't grow any more. You're all right, if you can only manage to keep your hands and feet down. You've got good eyes and a good jaw, and it's the jaw that tells the man. Now, that's the trouble with that Jack Starr they want to nominate for governor. He lacks jaw. 'You can't make a governor out of a fellow who hasn't jaw,' that's what I said. And besides, he deliberately trod on my toe the first time I ever met him. Didn't know it was gouty, eh? What right has he got, I asked, to suppose that any gentleman's toe isn't gouty?"

His lower lip protruded angrily, and he sat staring into his glass of water with an enquiring and sulky look. It is no small tribute to my capacity for hero-worship to say that it survived even this nearer approach to the gouty presence of my divinity. But the glamour of success — the only glamour that shines without borrowed light in the hard, dry atmosphere of the workaday world — still hung around him; and his very dissipations — yes, even his fleshly frailties — reflected, for the moment at least, a romantic interest. I began to wonder if certain moral weaknesses were, indeed, the inevitable attributes of the great man, and there shot into my mind, with a youthful folly of regret, the memory of a drink I had declined that morning, and of a pretty maiden at the Old Market whom I might have kissed and did not. Was the doctor's teaching wrong, after all, and had his virtues made him a failure in life, while the General's vices had but helped him to his success? I was very young, and I had not yet reached the age when I could perceive the expediency of the path of virtue unless in the end it

bordered on pleasant places. "The General is a bigger man than the doctor," I thought, half angrily, "and yet the General will be a gay old bird as long as the gout permits him to hobble." And it seemed to me suddenly that the moral order, on which the doctor loved to dilate, had gone topsy-turvy while I stood on the General's porch. As if reading my thoughts the great man looked up at me, with his roguish twinkle.

"Now there's Theophilus!" he observed. "Whatever you are, sir, don't be a damned mollycoddle."

Young George, plucking persistently at my sleeve, drew me at last out of the presence and into the house, where I smelt the fragrance of strawberries, freshly gathered.

"Here're the books," said George, leading me to the door of a long room, filled with rosewood bookcases and family portraits of departed Bolingbrokes. Then as I was about to cross the threshold, the sound of a bright voice speaking to the General on the porch caused me to stop short, and stand holding my breath in the hall.

"Good afternoon, General! You look as if you needed exercise."

"Exercise, indeed! Do you take me for your age, you minx?"

"Oh, come, General! You aren't old — you're lazy."

By this time George and I had edged nearer the porch, and even before he breathed her name in a whisper, I knew in the instant that her sparkling glance ran over me, that she was my little girl of the red shoes just budding into womanhood. She was standing in a square patch of sunlight, midway be-

tween the steps and a bed of red geraniums near the gate, and her dress of some thin white material was blown closely against the curves of her bosom and her rounded hips. Over her broad white forehead, with its heavily arched black eyebrows, the mass of her pale brown hair spread in the strong breeze and stood out like the wings of a bird in flight, and this gave her whole, finely poised figure a swift and expectant look, as of one who is swept forward by some radiant impulse. Her face, too, had this same ardent expression; I saw it in her eyes, which fixed me the next moment with her starry and friendly gaze; in her very full red lips that broke the pure outline of her features; and in her strong, square chin held always a little upward with a proud and impatient carriage. So vivid was my first glimpse of her, that for a single instant I wondered if the radiance in her figure was not produced by some fleeting accident of light and shadow. When I knew her better I learned that this quality of brightness belonged neither to the mind nor to an edge of light, but to the face itself — to some peculiar mingling of clear grey with intense darkness in her brow and eyes.

As she stood there chatting gayly with the General, young George eyed her from the darkened hall with a glance in which I read, when I turned to him, a touch of his uncle's playful masculine superiority.

"She'll be a stunner, if she doesn't get too big," he observed. "I don't like big girls — do you?"

Then as I made no rejoinder, he added after a moment, "Do you think her mouth spoils her? Aunt Hatty calls her mouth coarse."

"Coarse?" I echoed angrily. "What does she mean by coarse?"

"Oh, too red and too full. She says a lady's mouth ought to be a delicate bow."

"I never saw a delicate bow —"

"No more did I — but I'd call Sally a regular stunner now, mouth and all. Sally!" he broke out suddenly, and stepped out on the porch. "I'll go riding with you some day," he said, "if you want me."

She laughed up at him. "But I don't want you."

"You wanted me bad enough a year ago."

"That was a year ago."

Running hurriedly down the steps, he stood talking to her beside the bed of scarlet geraniums, while I felt a burning embarrassment pervade my body to the very palms of my hands.

"Where's the other fellow, George?" called the General, suddenly. "What's become of him?"

As he turned his head in my direction, I left the hall, and came out upon the porch, acutely conscious, all the time, that there was too much of me, that my hands and feet got in my way, that I ought to have put on a different shirt in the afternoon.

Sally was stooping over to snip off the head of a geranium, and when she looked up the next instant, with her hair blown back from her forehead, her starry, expectant gaze rested full on my own.

"Why, it's the boy I used to know," she exclaimed, moving toward me. "Boy, how do you do?"

She put out her hand, and as I took it in mine, I saw for the first time that she was a large girl for

her age, and would be a large woman. Her figure was already ripening under her thin white gown, but her hands and feet were still those of a child, and moulded, I saw, with that peculiar delicacy, which, I had learned from the doctor, was the distinguishing characteristic of the Virginian aristocracy.

"It is a long time since — since I saw you," she remarked in a cordial voice.

"It's been eight years," I answered. "I wonder that you remember me."

"Oh, I never forget. And besides, if I didn't see you for eight years more, I should still recognise you by your eyes. There aren't many boys," she said merrily, "who have eyes like a blue-eyed collie's."

With this she turned from me to George, and after a word or two to the General, and a nod in my direction, they passed through the gate, and went slowly along the street, her pale brown hair still blown like a bird's wing behind her.

The General's sister, young George's Aunt Hatty, a severe little lady, with a very flat figure, had come out on the porch, and was offering her brother a dose of medicine.

"A good girl, Hatty," remarked the great man, in an affable mood. "A little too much of her Aunt Matoaca's spirit for a wife, but a very good girl, as long as you ain't married to her."

"She would be handsome, George, except for her mouth. It's a pity her mouth spoils her."

"What's the matter with her mouth? I haven't got your eyesight, Hatty, but it appears a perfectly good mouth to me."

"That's because you have naturally coarse tastes, George. A lady's mouth should be a delicate bow."

A delicate bow, indeed! Those full, sensitive lips that showed like a splash of carmine in the clear pallor of her face! As I walked home under the broad, green leaves of the sycamores, I remembered the features of the pretty maiden at the Old Market, and they appeared to me suddenly divested of all beauty. It was as if a bright beam of sunshine had fallen on a blaze of artificial light, and extinguished it forever. Henceforth I should move straight toward a single love, as I had already begun to move straight toward a single ambition.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH I ENTER SOCIETY AND GET A FALL

My first successful speculation was made in my twenty-first year with five hundred dollars paid to me by Bob Brackett when the Nectar blend had been six months on the market. By the General's advice I put the money in the Old South Chemical Company, and selling out a little later at high profits, I immediately reinvested. As the years went by, that smoking mixture, discovered almost by accident in an idle moment, began to yield me considerably larger checks twice a year; and twice a year, with the General's enthusiastic assistance, I went in for a modest speculation from which I hoped sometime to reap a fortune. When I was twenty-five, a temporary depression in the market gave me the opportunity which, as Dr. Theophilus had informed me almost daily for ten years, "waits always around the corner for the man who walks quickly." I put everything I owned into copper mining stock, then selling very low, and a year later when the copper trade recovered quickly and grew active, I rushed to the General and enquired breathlessly if I must sell out.

"Hold on and await developments," he replied from his wicker chair over his bandaged foot, "and remember that the successful speculator is the man who always runs in the other direction from the crowd.

When you see people sitting still, you'd better get up, and when you see them begin to get up, you'd better sit still. Fortune's a woman, you know; don't try to flirt with her, but at the same time don't throw your boots at her head."

Five years before I had left the tobacco factory to go into the General's office, and my days were spent now, absorbed and alert, beside the chair in which he sat, coolly playing his big game of chess, and controlling a railroad. He was in his day the strongest financier in the South, and he taught me my lesson. Tireless, sleepless, throbbing with a fever that was like the fever of love, I studied at his side every movement of the market, I weighed every word he uttered, I watched every stroke of his stout cork-handled pen. An infallible judge of men, my intimate knowledge soon taught me that it was by judging men, not things, he had won his success. "Learn men, learn men, learn men," he would repeat in one of his frequent losses of temper. "Everything rests on a man, and the way to know the thing is to know the man."

"That's why I'm learning you, General," I once replied, as he hobbled out of his office on my arm.

"Oh, I know, I know," he retorted with his sly chuckle. "You are letting me lean on you now because you think the time will come when you can throw me aside and stand up by yourself. It's age and youth, my boy, age and youth."

He sighed wearily, and looking at him I saw for the first time that he was growing old.

"Well, you've stood straight enough in your day, sir," I answered.

"Oh, I've had my youth, and I shan't begin to put on a long face because I've lost it. I didn't have your stature, Ben, but I had a pretty fair middling-size one of my own. They used to say of me that I had an eye for the big chance, and that's a thing a man's got to be born with. To see big you've got to be big, and that's what I like about you — you ain't busy looking for specks."

"If I can only become as big a man as you, General, I shall be content."

"No, you won't, no, you won't, don't stop at me. Already they are beginning to call you my 'wonderful boy,' you know. 'I like that wonderful boy of yours, George,' Jessoms said to me only last night at the club. You know Jessoms — don't you? He's president of the Union Bank."

"Yes, I talked to him for two solid hours yesterday."

"He told me so, and I said to him: 'By Jove, you're right, Jessoms, and that boy's got a future ahead of him if he doesn't swell.' Now that's the Gospel truth, Ben, and all the body you've got ain't going to save you if you don't keep your head. If you ever feel it beginning to swell, you step outside and put it under a pump, that's the best thing I know of. How old are you?"

"Twenty-six."

"And you've got fifty thousand dollars already?"

"Thanks to you, sir."

"So you ain't swelled yet. Well, I've given you six years of hard training, and I made it all the blamed harder because I liked you. You've got the look of success about you, I've seen enough of it to know it

They used to say of me in Washington that I could sit in my office chair and overlook a line of men and spot every last one of them that was going to get on. I never went wrong but once, and that was because the poor devil began to swell and thought he was as big as his own shadow. But if the look's there, I see it — it's something in the eye and the jaw, and the grip of the hands that nobody can give you except God Almighty — and by George, it turns me into a downright heathen and makes me believe in fate. When a man has that something in the eye and in the jaw and in the grip of the hand, there ain't enough devils in the universe to keep him from coming out on top at the last. He may go under, but he won't stay under — no, sir, not if they pile all the bu'sted stocks in the market on top his shoulders."

"Anyway, you've started me rolling, General, whether I spin on or come to a dead stop."

"Then remember," he retorted slyly, as we parted, "that my earnest advice to a young man starting in business is — don't begin to swell!"

There was small danger of that, I thought, as I went on alone with my vision of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad. From my childhood I had seen the big road, as I saw it to-day, sweeping in a bright track over the entire South, lengthening, branching, winding away toward the distant horizon, girdling the cotton fields, the rice fields, and the coal fields, like a protecting arm. One by one, I saw now, the small adjunct lines absorbed by the main system, until in the whole South only the Great South Midland and Atlantic would be left. To dominate that

living organism, to control, in my turn, that splendid liberator of a people's resources, this was still the inaccessible hope upon which I had fixed my heart.

In my room I found young George Bolingbroke, who had been waiting, as he at once informed me, "a good half an hour."

"I say, Ben," he broke out the next minute, "why don't you get the housemaid to tie your cravats? She'd do it a long sight better. Are your fingers all thumbs?"

"They must be," I replied with a humility I had never assumed before the General, "I can't do the thing properly to save my life."

"I wonder it doesn't give you a common look," he remarked dispassionately, while I winced at the word, "but somehow it only makes you appear superior to such trifles, like a giant gazing over molehills at a mountain. It's your size, I reckon, but you're the kind of chap who can put on a turned-down collar with your evening clothes, or a tie that's been twisted through a wringer, and not look ridiculous. It's the rest of us that seem fops because we're properly dressed."

"I'd prefer to wear the right thing, you know," I returned, crestfallen.

"You never will. Anybody might as well expect a mountain to put forth rose-bushes instead of pine. It suits you, somehow, like your hair, which would make the rest of us look a regular guy. But I'm forgetting my mission. I've brought you an invitation to a party."

"What on earth should I do at a party?"

"Look pleasant. Did I take you to Miss Lessie Bell's dancing class for nothing? and were you put through the steps of the Highland Fling in vain?"

"I wasn't put through, I never learned."

"Well, you kicked at it anyway. I say, is all your pirouetting to be done with stocks? Are you going to pass away in ignorance of polite society and the manners of the ladies?"

"When I make a fortune, perhaps —"

"Perhaps is always too late. To-morrow is better."

"Where is the party?"

"The Blands are giving it. Uncle George was puffing and blowing about you when we dined there last Sunday, and Sally Mickleborough told me to bring you to her party on Wednesday night."

Rising hurriedly I walked away from young George to the fireplace. A mist was before my eyes, I smelt again the scent of wallflowers, and I saw in a dream the old grey house, with its delicate lace curtains parted from the small square window-panes as if a face looked out on the crooked pavement.

"I'll go, George," I said, wheeling about, "if you'll pledge yourself that I go properly dressed."

"Done," he responded, with his unfailing amiability. "I'll tie your cravat myself; and thank your stars, Ben, that whatever you are, you can't be little, for that's the unforgivable sin in Sally's eyes."

On Wednesday night he proved as good as his promise, and when nine o'clock struck, it found me, in irreproachable evening clothes, following him down Franklin Street, to the old house, where a softly coloured light streamed through the windows and lay

in a rosy pool under the sycamores. All day I had been very nervous. At the moment when I was reading telegrams for the General, I had suddenly remembered that I possessed no gloves suitable to be worn at my first party, and I had committed so many blunders that the great man had roared the word "Swelled!" in a furious tone. Now, however, when the sound of a waltz, played softly on stringed instruments, fell on my ears, my nervousness departed as quickly as it had come. The big mahogany doors swung open before us, and as I passed with George, into the brilliantly lighted hall, where the perfume of roses filled the air, I managed to move, if not with grace, at least with the necessary dignity of an invited guest. The lamps, placed here and there amid feathery palm branches, glowed under pink shades like enormous roses in full bloom, and up and down the wide staircase, carpeted in white, a number of pretty girls tripped under trailing garlands of Southern smilax. As we entered the door on the right, I saw Miss Mitty and Miss Matoaca, standing very erect in their black brocades and old lace, with outstretched hands and constantly smiling lips.

George presented me, with the slightly formal manner which seemed appropriate to the occasion. I had held the little hand of each lady for a minute in my own, and had looked once into each pair of brightly shining eyes, when my glance, dropping from theirs, flew straight as a bird to Sally Mickleborough, who stood talking animatedly to an elderly gentleman with grey side-whiskers and a pleasant laugh. She was dressed all in white, and her pale brown hair, which I

had last seen flying like the wing of a bird, was now braided and wound in a wreath about her head. As the elderly gentleman bowed and passed on, she lifted her eyes, and her starry, expectant gaze rested full on my face.

Between us there stretched an expanse of polished floor, in which the pink-shaded lamps and the nodding roses were mirrored as in a pool. Around us there was the music of stringed instruments, playing a waltz softly; the sound, too, of many voices, now laughing, now whispering; of Miss Mitty's repeated "It was so good of you to come"; of Miss Matoaca's gently murmured "We are *so* glad to have you with us"; of Dr. Theophilus's "You grow younger every day, ladies. Will you dance to-night?"; of General Bolingbroke's "I never missed an opportunity of coming to you in my life, ma'am"; of a confused chorus of girlish murmurs, of youthful merriment.

For one delirious instant it seemed to me that if I stepped on the shining floor, I should go down as on a frozen pool. Then her look summoned me, and as I drew nearer she held out her hand and stood waiting. There was a white rose in her wreath of plaits, and when I bent to speak to her the fragrance floated about me.

"Do you still remember me because of the blue-eyed collie?" I asked, for it was all I could think of.

Her firm square chin was tilted a little upward, and as she smiled at me, her thick black eyebrows were raised in the old childish expression of charming archness. It was the face of an idea rather than the face of a woman, and the power, the humour, the radiant

energy in her look, appeared to divide her, as by an immeasurable distance, from the pretty girls of her own age among whom she stood. She seemed at once older and younger than her companions — older by some deeper and sadder knowledge of life, younger because of the peculiar buoyancy with which she moved and spoke. As I looked at her mouth, very full, of an almost violent red, and tremulous with expression, I remembered Miss Hatty's "delicate bow" with an odd feeling of anger.

"It has been a long time, but I haven't forgotten you, Ben Starr," she said.

"Do you remember the night of the storm and the cup of milk you wouldn't drink?"

"How horrid I was! And the geranium you gave me?"

"And the churchyard and the red shoes and Samuel?"

"Poor Samuel. I can't have any dogs now. Aunt Mitty doesn't like them —"

Some one came up to speak to her, and while I bowed awkwardly and turned away, I saw her gaze looking back at me from the roses and the pink-shaded lamps. A touch on my arm brought the face of young George between me and my ecstatic visions.

"I say, Ben, there's an awfully pretty girl over there I want you to waltz with — Bessy Dandridge."

In spite of my protest he led me the next instant to a slim figure in pink tarlatan, with a crown of azaleas, who sat in one corner between two very stout ladies. As I approached, the stout ladies smiled at me benignly hiding suppressed yawns behind feather fans. Miss

Dandridge was, as George said, "awfully pretty," with large shallow eyes of pale blue, an insipid mouth, and a shy little smile that looked as if she had put it on with her crown of azaleas and would take it off again and lay it away in her bureau drawer when the party was over.

"Get up and dance, dear," urged one of the stout ladies sleepily, "we ought to have come earlier."

"The girls look very well," remarked the other, suddenly alert and interested, "but I don't like this new fashion of wearing the hair. Sally Mickleborough is handsome, though it's a pity she takes so much after her father."

My arm was already around the pink tarlatan waist of my partner, the crown of azaleas had brushed my shoulder like a gentle caress, and I had whirled halfway down the room in triumphant agony, when a floating phrase uttered in a girlish voice entered my ears and carried confusion into my brain.

"Get out of the way. Doesn't Bessy look for all the world like a rose-bush uprooted by a whirlwind?"

I caught the words as I went, and they proved too much for the trembling balance of my self-confidence. My strained gaze, fixed on the glassy surface beneath my feet, plunged suddenly downward amid the reflected roses and lamps. The music went wild and out of tune on the air. My blood beat violently in my pulses, I made a single false step, tripped over a flounce of pink tarlatan, which seemed to shriek as I went down, and the next instant my partner and I were flat on the polished floor, clutching desperately for support at the mirrored roses beneath.

The wreck lasted only a minute. A single suppressed titter fell on my ears, and was instantly checked. I looked up in time to see a smile freeze on Miss Mitty's face, and melt immediately into an expression of sympathy. The pretty girl, with the crown of azalea hanging awry on her flaxen tresses, and her flounce of pink tarlatan held disconsolately in her hand, looked for one dreadful instant as if she were about to burst into tears. A few dancers had stopped and gathered sympathetically around us, but the rest were happily whirling on, while the music, after a piercing crescendo, came breathlessly to a pause amid a silence that I felt to be far louder than sound. The perspiration, forced out by inward agony, stood in drops on my forehead, and as I wiped it away, I said almost defiantly: —

"It was the fault of George Bolingbroke. I told him I didn't know how to dance."

"I think I'd better go home," murmured the heroine of the disaster, catching her lower lip in her teeth to bite back a sob, "I wonder where mamma can be?"

"Here, dear," responded a commiserating voice, and I was about to turn away in disgrace without a further apology, when the little circle around us divided with a flutter, and Sally appeared, leaning on the arm of a youth with bulging eyes and a lantern jaw.

"Go home, Bessy? Why, how silly!" she exclaimed, and her energetic voice seemed suddenly to dominate the situation. "It wasn't so many years ago, I'm sure, that you used to tumble for the pleasure of it. Here, let me pin on your crown, and then run straight upstairs to the red room and get mammy to mend your flounce.

It won't take her a minute. There, now, you're all the prettier for a high colour."

When she had pushed Bessy across the threshold with her small, strong hands, she turned to me, laughing a little, and slipped her arm into mine with the air of a young queen bestowing a favour.

"It's just as well, Ben Starr," she said, "that you're engaged to me for this dance, and not to a timid lady."

It wasn't my dance, I knew; in fact, I had not had sufficient boldness to ask her for one, and I discovered the next minute, when she sent away rather impatiently a youth who approached, that she had taken such glorious possession merely from some indomitable instinct to give people pleasure.

"Shall we sit down and talk a little over there under the smilax?" she asked, "or would you rather dance? If you'd like to dance," she added with a sparkle in her face, "I am not afraid."

"Well, I am," I retorted, "I shall never dance again."

"How serious that sounds — but since you've made the resolution I hope you'll keep it. I like things to be kept."

"There's no chance of my breaking it. I never made but one other solemn vow in my life."

"And you've kept that?"

"I am keeping it now."

She sat down, arranging her white draperies under the festoons of smilax, her left hand, from which a big feather fan drooped, resting on her knees, her small, white-slippered foot moving to the sound of the waltz.

"Was it a vow not to grow any more?" she asked with a soft laugh.

"It was," I leaned toward her and the fragrance of the white rose, drooping a little in her wreath of plaits, filled my nostrils, "that I would not stay common."

Her lashes, which had been lowered, were raised suddenly, and I met her eyes. "O Ben Starr, Ben Starr," she said, "how well you have kept it!"

"Do you remember the stormy night when you would not let me take your wet cap because I was a common boy?"

"How hateful I must have been!"

"On that night I determined that I would not grow up to be a common man. That was why I ran away, that was why I went into the tobacco factory, that was why I started to learn Johnson's Dictionary by heart — why I drudged over my Latin, why I went into stocks, why —"

Her eyes had not left my face, but unfurling the big feather fan, she waved it slowly between us. I, who had, in the words of Dr. Theophilus, "no small wits in my head," who could stand, dumb and a clown, in a ballroom, who could even trip up my partner, had found words that could arrest the gaze of the woman before me. To talk at all I must talk of big things, and it was of big things that I now spoke — of poverty, of struggle, of failure, of aspiration. My mind, like my body, was not rounded to the lighter graces, the rippling surface, that society requires. In my everyday clothes, among men, I was at no loss for words, but the high collar and the correctly tied cravat I wore seemed to strangle my throat, until those starry eyes, seeking big things also, had looked into mine. Then I forgot my fruitless efforts at conversa-

tion, I forgot the height of my collar, the stiffness of my shirt, the size of my hands and my feet. I forgot that I was a plain man, and remembered only that I was a man. The merely social, the trivial, the commonplace, dropped from my thoughts. My dignity, — the dignity that George Bolingbroke had called that of size, — was restored to me; and beyond the rosy lights and the disturbing music, we stood a man and a woman together. Our consciousness had left the surface of life. We had become acutely aware of each other and aware, too, of the silence in which our eyes wavered and met.

"That was why I starved and sweated and drudged and longed," I added, while her fan waved with its large, slow movement between us, "that was why —"

Her lips parted, she leaned slightly forward, and I saw in her face what I had never seen in the face of a woman before — the bloom of a soul.

"And you've done this all your life?"

"Since that stormy evening."

"You have won — already you have won —"

"Not yet. I am beginning and I may win in the end if I keep steady, if I don't lose my head. I shall win in the end — perhaps —"

"You will win what?"

"A fortune it may be, or it may be even the thing that has made the fortune seem worth the having."

"And that is?" she asked simply.

"It is too long a story. Some day, if you will listen, I may tell you, but not now —"

The dance stopped, she rose to her feet, and George

Bolingbroke, rushing excitedly to where we stood, claimed the coming Virginia reel as his own.

"Some day you shall tell me the long story, Ben Starr," she said, as she gave me her hand.

I watched her take her place in the Virginia reel, watched the dance begin, watched her full, womanly figure, in its soft white draperies, glide between the lines, with her head held high, her hand in George Bolingbroke's, her white slippers skimming the polished floor. Then turning away, I walked slowly down the length of the two drawing-rooms, and said "Good-night" to Miss Mitty and Miss Matoaca near the door. As I passed into the hall, I heard a woman's voice murmur distinctly: —

"Yes, he is a magnificent animal, but he has no social manner."

CHAPTER XII

I WALK INTO THE COUNTRY AND MEET WITH AN ADVENTURE

My sleep that night was broken by dreams of roses and pink-shaded lamps. For the first time in my life my brain and body alike refused rest, and the one was illumined as by the rosy glow of a flame, while the other was scorched by a fever which kept me tossing sleeplessly between Mrs. Clay's lavender-scented sheets. At last when the sun rose, I got out of bed, and hurriedly dressing, went up Franklin Street, and turned into one of the straight country roads which led through bronzed levels of broomsedge. Eastward the sun was ploughing a purple furrow across the sky, and toward the south a single golden cloud hung over some thin stretches of pine. The ghost of a moon, pale and watery, was riding low, after a night of high frolic, and as the young dawn grew stronger, I watched her melt gradually away like a face that one sees through smoke. The October wind, blowing with a biting edge over the broomsedge, bent the blood-red tops of the sumach like pointed flames toward the road.

For me a new light shone on the landscape — a light that seemed to have its part in the high wind, in the waving broomsedge, and in the rising sun. For the first time since those old days in the churchyard I felt

with every fibre of me, with every beat of my pulses, with every drop of my blood, that it was good to be alive — that it was worth while every bit of it. My starved boyhood, the drudgery in the tobacco factory, the breathless nights in the Old Market, the hours when, leaning over Johnson's Dictionary, I had been obliged to pinch myself to keep wide awake — the squalor out of which I had come, and the future into which I was going — all these were a part to-day of this strange new ecstasy that sang in the wind and moved in the waving broomsedge.

And through it all ran my thoughts: "How fragrant the white rose was in her hair! How tremulous her mouth! Are her eyes grey or green, and is it only the heavy shadow of her lashes that makes them appear black at times, as if they changed colour with her thoughts? Is it possible that she could ever love me? If I make a fortune will that bring me any nearer to her? Obscure as I am my cause is hopeless, but even if I were rich and powerful, should I ever dare to ascend the steps of that house where I had once delivered marketing at the kitchen door?"

The memory of the spring morning when I had first gone there with my basket on my arm returned to me, and I saw myself again as a ragged, barefooted boy resting beneath the silvery branches of the great sycamore. Even then I had dreamed of her; all through my life the thought of her had run like a thread of gold. I remembered her as she had stood in our little kitchen on that stormy October evening, holding her mop of a muff in her cold little hands, and looking back at me with her sparkling defiant gaze. Then she came to me

in her red shoes, dancing over the coloured leaves in the churchyard, and a minute later, as she had knelt in the box-bordered path patiently building her houses of moss and stones. As a child she had stirred my imagination, as a woman she had filled and possessed my thoughts. Always I had seen her a little above, a little beyond, but still beckoning me on.

The next instant my thoughts dropped back to the evening before, and I went over word for word every careless phrase she had spoken. Was she merely kind to the boor in her house? or had there been a deeper meaning in her divine smile — in her suddenly lifted eyes? "O Ben Starr, you have won!" she had said, and had the thrill in her voice, the tremor of her bosom under its fall of lace, meant that her heart was touched? Modest or humble I had never been. The will to fight — the exaggerated self-importance, the overweening pride of the strong man who has made his way by buffeting obstacles, were all mine; and yet, walking there that morning in the high wind between the rolling broomsedge and the blood-red sumach, I was aware again of the boyish timidity with which I had carried my market basket so many years ago to her kitchen doorstep. She had said of me last night that I was no longer "common." Was that because she had read in my glance that I had kept myself pure for her sake? — that for her sake I had made myself strong to resist as well as to achieve? Would Miss Mitty's or Miss Matoaca's verdict, I wondered, have been as merciful, as large as hers? "A magnificent animal, but with no social manner," the voice had said of me, and the words burned now, hot with shame, in my memory. The

recollection of my fall in the dance, of the crying lips of the pretty girl in pink tarlatan, while she stood holding her ruined flounce, became positive agony. What did she think of my boorishness? Was I, for her also, merely a magnificent animal? Had she noticed how ill at ease I felt in my evening clothes? O young Love, young Love, your sharpest torments are not with arrows, but with pin pricks!

A trailing blackberry vine, running like a crimson vein close to the earth, caught my foot, and I stooped for a minute. When I looked up she was standing clear against the reflected light of the sunrise, where a low hill rose above the stretches of broomsedge. Her sorrel mare was beside her, licking contentedly at a bright branch of sassafras; and I saw that she had evidently dismounted but the moment before. As I approached, she fastened her riding skirt above her high boots, and kneeling down on the dusty roadside, lifted the mare's foot and examined it with searching and anxious eyes. Her three-cornered riding hat had slipped to her shoulders, where it was held by a broad black band of elastic, and I saw her charming head, with its wreath of plaits, defined against the golden cloud that hung above the thin stretch of pines. At my back the full sunrise broke, and when she turned toward me, her gaze was dazzled for a moment by the flood of light.

"Let me have a look," I said, as I reached her, "is the mare hurt?"

"She went lame a few minutes ago. There's a stone in her foot, but I can't get it out."

"Perhaps I can."

Rising from her knees, she yielded me her place, and then stood looking down on me while I removed the stone.

"She'll still limp, I fear, it was a bad one," I said as I finished.

Without replying, she turned from me and ran a few steps along the road, calling, "Come, Dolly," in a caressing voice. The mare followed with difficulty, flinching as she put her sore foot to the ground.

"See how it hurts her," she said, coming back to me. "I'll have to lead her slowly — there's no other way."

"Why not ride at a walk?"

She shook her head. "My feet are better than a lame horse. It's not more than two miles anyway."

"And you danced all night?"

I hung the reins over my arm and we turned together, facing the sunrise.

"Yes, but the way to rest is to run out-of-doors. Are you often up with the dawn, too?"

"No, but I couldn't sleep. The music got into my head."

"Into mine also. But I often take a canter at sunrise. It is my hour."

"And this is your road?"

"Not always. I go different ways. This one I call the road-to-what-might-have-been because it turns off just as it reaches a glorious view."

"Then don't let's travel it. I'd rather go with you on the road-to-what-is-to-be."

She looked at me steadily for a minute with arching brows. "I wonder why they say of you that you have no social amenities?" she observed mockingly.

"I haven't. That isn't an amenity, it is a fact. To save my life I couldn't find a blessed thing to say last night to the little lady in pink tarlatan whose dress I tore."

"Poor Bessy!" she laughed softly, "she vows she'll never waltz with you again."

"She's perfectly safe to vow it."

"Oh, yes, I remember, and I hope you won't dance any more. Do you know, I like you better out-of-doors."

"Out-of-doors?"

"Well, the broomsedge is becoming to you. It seems your natural background somehow. Now it makes George Bolingbroke look frivolous."

"His natural background is the ballroom, and I'm not sure he hasn't the best of it. I can't live always in the broomsedge."

"Oh, it isn't only the broomsedge, though that goes admirably with your hair — it's the bigness, the space, the simplicity. You take up too much room among lamps and palms, you trip on a waxed floor, and down goes poor Bessy. But out here you are natural and at home. The sky sets off your head — and it's really very fine if you only knew it. Out here, with me, you are in your native element."

"Is that because you are my native element? Can you imagine poor Bessy fitting into the picture?"

"To tell the truth I can't imagine poor Bessy fitting you at all. Her native element is pink tarlatan."

"And yours?" I demanded.

"That you must find out for yourself." A smile played on her face like an edge of light.

"The sunrise," I answered.

"Like you, I am sorry that I can't be always in my proper setting," she replied.

"You are always. The sunrise never leaves you."

Her brows arched merrily, and I saw the tiny scar I had remembered from childhood catch up the corner of her mouth with its provoking and irresistible trick of expression.

"Do you mean to tell me that you learned these gallantries in Johnson's Dictionary?" she enquired, "or have you taken other lessons from the General besides those in speculations?"

I had got out of my starched shirt and my evening clothes, and the timidity of the ballroom had no part in me under the open sky. "Johnson's Dictionary wasn't my only teacher," I retorted, "nor was the General. At ten years of age I could recite the prosiest speeches of Sir Charles Grandison."

"Ah, that explains it. Well, I'm glad anyway you didn't learn it from the General. He broke poor Aunt Matoaca's heart, you know."

"Then I hope he managed to break his own at the same time."

"He didn't. I don't believe he had a big enough one to break. Oh, yes, I've always detested your great man, the General. They were engaged to be married, you have heard, I suppose, and three weeks before the wedding she found out some dreadful things about his life — and she behaved then, as Dr. Theophilus used to say, 'like a gentleman of honour.' He — he ought to have married another woman, but even after Aunt Matoaca gave him up, he refused to do it —

and this was what she never got over. If he had behaved as dishonourably as that in business, no man would have spoken to him, she said — and can you believe it? — she declined to speak to him for twenty years, though she was desperately in love with him all the time. She only began again when he got old and gouty and humbled himself to her. In my heart of hearts I can't help disliking him in spite of all his success, but I really believe that he has never in his life cared for any woman except Aunt Matoaca. It's because she's so perfectly honourable, I think — but, of course, it is her terrible experience that has made her so — so extreme in her views."

"What are her views?"

"She calls them principles — but Aunt Mitty says, and I suppose she's right, that it would have been more ladylike to have borne her wrongs in silence instead of shrieking them aloud. For my part I think that, however loud she shrieked, she couldn't shriek as loud as the General has acted."

"I hope she isn't still in love with him?"

Her clear rippling laugh — the laugh of a free spirit — fluted over the broomsedge. "Can you imagine it? One might quite as well be in love with one's Thanksgiving turkey. No, she isn't in love with him now, but she's in love with the idea that she used to be, and that's almost as bad. I know it's her own past that makes her think all the time about the wrongs of women. She wants to have them vote, and make the laws, and have a voice in the government. Do you?"

"I never thought about it, but I'm pretty sure I shouldn't like my wife to go to the polls," I answered.

Again she laughed. "It's funny, isn't it? — that when you ask a man anything about women, he always begins to talk about his wife, even when he hasn't got one?"

"That's because he's always hoping to have one, I suppose."

"Do you want one very badly?" she taunted.

"Dreadfully — the one I want."

"A real dream lady in pink tarlatan?"

"No, a living lady in a riding habit."

If I had thought to embarrass her by this flight of gallantry, my hope was fruitless, for the arrow, splintered by her smile, fell harmlessly to the dust of the road.

"An Amazon seems hardly the appropriate mate to Sir Charles Grandison," she retorted.

"Just now it was the General that I resembled."

"Oh, you out-generaled the General a mile back. Even he didn't attempt to break the heart of Aunt Matoaca at their second meeting."

The candid merriment in her face had put me wholly at ease, — I who had stood tongue-tied and blushing before the simpers of poor Bessy. Dare as I might, I could bring no shadow of self-consciousness, no armour of sex, into her sparkling eyes.

"And have I tried to break yours?" I asked bluntly.

"Have you? You know best. I am not familiar with Grandisonian tactics."

"I don't believe there's a man alive who could break your heart," I said.

With her arm on the neck of the sorrel mare, she gave me back my glance, straight and full, like a gallant boy.

"Nothing," she remarked blithely, "short of a hammer could do it."

We laughed together, and the laughter brought us into an intimacy which to me, at least, was dangerously sweet. My head whirled suddenly.

"You asked me last night about the one thing I'd wanted most all my life," I said.

"The thing that made you learn Johnson's Dictionary by heart?" she asked.

"Only to the end of the *c*'s. Don't credit me, please, with the whole alphabet."

"The thing, then," she corrected herself, " that made you learn the *a*, *b*, *c*'s of Johnson's Dictionary by heart?"

"If you wish it I will tell you what it was."

For the first time her look wavered. "Is it very long? Here is Franklin Street, and in a little while we shall be at home."

"It is not long — it is very short. It is a single word of three letters."

"I thought you said it had covered every hour of your life?"

"Every hour of my life has been covered by a word of three letters."

"What an elastic word!"

"It is, for it has covered everything at which I looked — both the earth and the sky."

"And the General and the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad?"

"Without that word the General and the railroad would have been nothing."

"How very much obliged to it the poor General must be!"

"Will you hear it?" I asked, for when I was once started to the goal there was no turning me by laughter.

She raised her eyes, which had been lowered, and looked at me long and deeply — so long and deeply that it seemed as if she were seeking something within myself of which even I was unconscious.

"Will you hear it?" I asked again.

Her gaze was still on mine. "What is the word?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

At the instant I felt that I staked my whole future, and yet that it was no longer in my power to hesitate or to draw back. "The word is — you," I replied.

Her hand dropped from the mare's neck, where it had almost touched mine, and I watched her mouth grow tremulous until the red of it showed in a violent contrast to the clear pallor of her face. Then she turned her head away from me toward the sun, and thoughtful and in silence, we passed down Franklin Street to the old grey house.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH I RUN AGAINST TRADITIONS

When we had delivered the mare to the coloured groom waiting on the sidewalk, she turned to me for the first time since I had uttered my daring word.

"You must come in to breakfast with us," she said, with a friendly and careless smile, "Aunt Mitty will be disappointed if I return without what she calls 'a cavalier.'"

The doubt occurred to me if Miss Mitty would consider me entitled to so felicitous a phrase, but smothering it the next minute as best I could, I followed Sally, not without trepidation, up the short flight of steps, and into the wide hall, where the air was heavy with the perfume of fading roses. Great silver bowls of them drooped now, with blighted heads, amid the withered smilax, and the floor was strewn thickly with petals, as if a strong wind had blown down the staircase. From the dining room came a delicious aroma of coffee, and as we crossed the threshold, I saw that the two ladies, in their lace morning caps, were already seated at the round mahogany table. From behind the tall old silver service, the grave oval face of Miss Mitty cast on me, as I entered, a look in which a faint wonder was mingled with a pleasant hereditary habit of welcome. A cover was already laid for the chance comer, and as I took possession of

it, in response to her invitation, I felt again that terrible shyness — that burning physical embarrassment of the plain man in unfamiliar surroundings. So had I felt on the morning when I had stood in the kitchen, with my basket on my arm, and declined the plum cake for which my mouth watered. In the road with Sally I had appeared to share, as she had said, something of the dignity of the broomsedge and the open sky; here opposite to Miss Matoaca, with the rich mahogany table and the vase of chrysanthemums between us, I seemed ridiculously out of proportion to the surroundings amid which I sat, speechless and awkward. Was it possible that any woman could look beneath that mountain of shyness, and discern a self-confidence in large matters that would some day make a greater man than the General?

"Cream and sugar?" enquired Miss Mitty, in a tone from which I knew she had striven to banish the recognition that she addressed a social inferior. Her pleasant smile seemed etched about her mouth, over the expression of faint wonder which persisted beneath. I felt that her racial breeding, like Miss Matoaca's, was battling against her instinctive aversion, and at the same moment I knew that I ought to have declined the invitation Sally had given. A sense of outrage — of resentment — swelled hot and strong in my heart. What was this social barrier — this aristocratic standard that could accept the General and reject such men as I? If it had sprung back, strong and flexible as a steel wire, before the man, would it still present its irresistible strength against the power of money? In that instant I resolved that if wealth alone could

triumph over it, wealth should become the weapon of my attack. Then my gaze met Sally's over the chrysanthemums, and the thought in my brain shrank back suddenly abashed.

"Dolly got a stone in her foot, poor dear," she remarked to her aunts, "and Ben Starr got it out. She limped all the way home."

At her playful use of my name, a glance flashed from Miss Mitty to Miss Matoaca and back again across the high silver service.

"Then we are very grateful to Mr. Starr," replied Miss Mitty in a prim voice. "Sister Matoaca and I were just agreeing that you ought not to be allowed to ride alone outside the city."

"Perhaps we can arrange with Ben to go walking along the same road," responded Sally provokingly, "and I shouldn't be in need of a groom."

For the first time I raised my eyes. "I'll walk anywhere except along the road-to-what-might-have-been," I said, and my voice was quite steady.

Her glance dropped to her plate. Then she looked across the vase of chrysanthemums into Miss Mitty's face.

"Ben and I used to play together, Aunt Mitty," she said, offering the information as if it were the most pleasant fact in the world, "when I lived on Church Hill."

A flush rose to Miss Mitty's cheeks, and passed the next instant, as if by a wave of sympathy, into Miss Matoaca's.

"I hoped, Sally, that you had forgotten that part of your life," observed the elder lady stiffly.

"How can I forget it, Aunt Mitty? I was very happy over there."

"And are you not happy here, dear?" asked Miss Matoaca, hurt by the words, and bending over, she smelt a spray of lilies-of-the-valley that had lain beside her plate.

"Of course I am, Aunt Matoaca, but one doesn't forget. I met Ben first when I was six years old. Mamma and I stopped at his house in a storm one night on our way over to grandmama's. We were soaking wet, and they were very kind and dried us and gave us hot things to drink, and his mother wrapped me up in a shawl and sent me here with mamma. I shall always remember how good they were, and how he broke off a red geranium from his mother's plant and gave it to me."

As she told her story, Miss Mitty watched her attentively, the expression of faint wonder in her eyes and her narrow eyebrows, and her pleasant, rather pained smile etched delicately about her fine, thin lips. Her long, oval face, suffused now by an unusual colour, rose above the quaint old coffee urn, on which the Fairfax crest, belonging to her mother's family, was engraved. If any passion could have been supposed to rock that flat, virgin bosom, I should have said that it was moved by a passion of wounded pride.

"Is your coffee right, Mr. Starr? Have you cream enough?" she enquired politely. "Selim, give Mr. Starr a partridge."

My coffee was right, and I declined the bird, which would have stuck in my throat. The united pride of the Blands and the Fairfaxes, I told myself, could not

equal that possessed by a single obscure son of a stone-cutter.

"If you are as hungry as I am, you are famished," observed Sally, with a gallant effort to make a semblance of gayety sport on a frozen atmosphere. "Aunt Matoaca, have pity and give me a muffin."

Muffins were passed by Miss Matoaca; waffles were presented immediately by Selim.

"Do take a hot one," urged Miss Matoaca anxiously, "yours is quite cold."

I took a hot one, and after placing it on the small white and gold plate, swore desperately to myself that I would not eat a mouthful in that house until I could eat there as an equal. The faint wonder beneath the pained fixed smile on Miss Mitty's face stabbed me like a knife. All her anxious hospitality, all her offers of cream and partridges, could not for a single minute efface it. Turning my head I discerned the same expression, still fainter, still gentler, reflected on Miss Matoaca's lips — as if some subtle bond of sympathy between them were asking always, beneath the hereditary courtesy: "Can this be possible? Are we, whose mother was a Fairfax, whose father was a Bland, sitting at our own table with a man who is not a gentleman by birth? — who has even brought a market basket to our kitchen door? What has become of the established order if such a thing as this can happen to two unprotected Virginia ladies?"

And it was quite characteristic of their race, of their class, that the greater the wonder grew in their gentle minds, the more sedulously they plied me with coffee and partridges and preserves — that the more their

souls abhorred me, the more lavish became their hands. Divided as they were by their principles, something stronger than a principle now held the sisters together, and this was a passionate belief in the integrity of their race.

Again Selim handed the waffles in a frozen silence, and again Sally made an unsuccessful attempt to produce an appearance of animation.

"Are you going to market, Aunt Matoaca?" she asked, "and will you remember to buy seed for my canary?"

The flush in Miss Matoaca's cheek this time, I could not explain.

"Sister Mitty will go," she replied, in confusion, "I — I have another engagement."

"She alludes to a meeting of one of her boards," observed Miss Mitty, and turning to me she added, with what I felt to be an unfair thrust at the shrinking bosom of Miss Matoaca, "My sister is a great reader, Mr. Starr, and she has drawn many of her opinions out of books instead of from life."

I looked up, my eyes met Miss Matoaca's, and I remembered her love story.

"We all do that, I suppose," I answered. "Even when we get them from life, haven't most of them had their beginning in books?"

"I am not a great reader myself," remarked Miss Mitty, a trifle primly. "My father used to say that when a lady had read a chapter of her Bible in the morning, and consulted her cook-book, she had done as much literary work as was good for her. Too intimate an acquaintance with books, he always said,

was apt to unsettle the views, and the best judgment a woman can have, I am sure, is the opinion of the gentlemen of her family."

"That may be true," I admitted, and my self-possession returned to me, until a certain masculine assurance sounded in my voice, "but I'm quite sure I shouldn't like anybody else's opinion to decide mine."

"You are a man," rejoined Miss Mitty, and I felt that she had not been able to bring her truthful lips to utter the word "gentleman." "It is natural that you should have independent ideas, but, as far as I am concerned, I am perfectly content to think as my grandmother and my great-grandmother have thought before me. Indeed, it seems to me almost disrespectful to differ from them."

"And it was dear great-grandmama," laughed Sally, "who when the doctor once enquired if her tooth ached, turned to great-grandpapa and asked, 'Does it ache, Bolivar?'"

She had tossed her riding hat aside, and a single loosened wave of her hair had fallen low on her forehead above her arched black eyebrows. Beneath it her eyes, very wide and bright, held a puzzled yet resolute look, as if they were fixed upon an obstacle which frightened her, and which she was determined to overcome.

"You are speaking of my grandmama, Sally," observed Miss Mitty, and I could see that the levity of the girl had wounded her.

"I'm sorry, dear Aunt Mitty, she was my great-grandmama, too, but that doesn't keep me from thinking her a very silly person."

"A silly person? Your own great-grandmama, Sally!" Her mind, long and narrow, like her face, had never diverged, I felt, from the straight line of descent.

"My sister and I unfortunately do not agree in our principles, Mr. Starr," said Miss Matoaca, breaking her strained silence suddenly in a high voice, and with an energy that left tremors in her thin, delicate figure. "Indeed, I believe that I hold views which are opposed generally by Virginia ladies — but I feel it to be a point of honour that I should let them be known." She paused breathlessly, having delivered herself of the heresy that worked in her bosom, and a moment later she sat trembling from head to foot with her eyes on her plate. Poor little gallant lady, I thought, did she remember the time when at the call of that same word "honour," she had thrown away, not only her peace, but her happiness?

"Whatever your opinions may be, Miss Matoaca, I respect your honest and loyal support of them," I said.

The embarrassment that had overwhelmed me five minutes before had vanished utterly. At the first chance to declare myself — to contend, not merely with a manner, but with a situation, I felt the full strength of my manhood. The General himself could not have uttered his piquant pleasantries in a blither tone than I did my impulsive defence of the right of private judgment. Miss Mitty raised her eyes to mine, and Miss Matoaca did likewise. Over me their looks clashed, and I saw at once that it was the relentless warfare between individual temperament and racial

instinct. In spite of the obscurity of my birth, I knew that in Miss Matoaca, at that instant, I had won a friend.

"Surely Aunt Matoaca is right to express what she thinks," said Sally, loyally following my lead.

"No woman of our family has ever thought such things, Sally, or has ever felt called upon to express her views in the presence of men."

"Well, I suppose, some woman has got to begin some day, and it may as well be Aunt Matoaca."

"There is no reason why any woman should begin. Your great-grandmama did not."

"But my great-grandmama couldn't tell when her tooth ached, and you can, I've heard you do it. It was very disrespectful of you, dear Auntie."

"If you cannot be serious, Sally, I refuse to discuss the subject."

"But how can anybody be serious, Aunt Mitty, about a person who didn't know when her own tooth ached?"

"Dear sister," remarked Miss Matoaca, in a voice of gentle obstinacy, "I do not wish to be the cause of a disagreement between Sally and yourself. Any question that was not one of principle I should gladly give up. I know you are not much of a reader, but if you would only glance at an article in the last *Fortnightly Review* on the Emancipation of Women —"

"I should have thought, sister Matoaca, that Dr. Peterson's last sermon in St. Paul's on the feminine sphere would have been a far safer guide for you. His text, Mr. Starr," she added, turning to me, "was, 'She looketh well to the ways of her household.'"

"At least you can't accuse Aunt Matoaca of neglecting the ways of her household," said Sally, merrily, "even the General rises up after dinner and praises her mince pies. Do you like mince pies, Ben?"

I replied that I was sure that I should like Miss Matoaca's, for I had heard them lauded by General Bolingbroke; at which the poor lady blushed until her cheeks looked like withered rose leaves. She was one of those unhappy women, I had learned during breakfast, who suffered from a greater mental activity than was usually allotted to the females of their generation. Behind that long and narrow face, with its pencilled eyebrows, its fine, straight nose, and restlessly shining eyes, what battles of conviction against tradition must have waged. Was the final triumph of intellect due, in reality, to the accident of an unhappy love? Had the General's frailties driven this shy little lady, with her devotion to law and order, and her excellent mince pies, into a martyr for the rights of sex?

"I am told that Mrs. Clay prides herself upon her pies," she remarked. "I have never eaten them, but Dr. Theophilus tells me that he prefers mine because I use less suet."

"I am sure nobody's could compare with yours, sister Matoaca," observed Miss Mitty in an affable tone, "and I happen to know that Mrs. Clay resorts to Mrs. Camberwell's cook-book. *We* prefer Mrs. Randolph's," she added, turning to me.

"Well, we'll ask Ben to dinner some day, and he may judge," said Sally.

Instantly I felt that her words were a challenge,

and the shining mahogany table, with its delicate lace mats, its silver and its chrysanthemums, became a battle-field for opposing spirits. I saw Miss Mitty stiffen and the corners of her mouth grow rigid under her pleasant, fixed smile.

"Will you have some marmalade, Mr. Starr?" she asked, and I knew that with the phrase, she had flung down her gauntlet on the table. Her very politeness veiled a purpose, not of iron, but finely tempered and resistless as a blade. Had she said to me: "Sir, you are an upstart, and I, sitting quietly at the same table with you, and inviting you to eat of the same dish of marmalade, am a descendant of the Blands and the Fairfaxes," — her words would have stabbed me less deeply than did the pathetic "Can this be possible?" of her smiling features.

A canary, swinging in a gilt cage between the curtains at the window, broke suddenly into a jubilant fluting; and rising from the table, we stood for a minute, as if petrified, with our eyes on the bird, and on the box of blossoming sweet alyssum upon the sill. A little later, when I left with the plea that the General expected me at nine o'clock, the two elder ladies gave me their small, transparent hands, while their polite farewell sounded as final as if it had been uttered on the edge of an open grave. Only Sally, smiling up at me, with that puzzled yet determined look still in her eyes, said gayly, "When you go walking at sunrise, Ben, choose the road-to-what-might-have-been!"

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH I TEST MY STRENGTH

HER words rang in my ears while I went along the crooked pavement under the burnished sycamore. As I met the General at the corner I was still hearing them, and they prompted the speech that burst impulsively from my lips.

"General, I've got to get rich quickly, and I'm finding a way."

"You'd better make sure first that your royal road doesn't end in a ditch."

"I was talking to a man from West Virginia yesterday about buying out the National Oil Company, and I dreamed of it all night. He wants me to go in with him, and start a refining plant. If I can get special privileges and rebates from the railroads to give us advantages, we may make a big business of it."

"You may and you mayn't. Who's your man?"

"Sam Brackett. Bob's brother, you know."

"A mighty good fellow, and shrewd, too. But I'd think it over carefully, if I were you."

I did think it over, and the result of my thoughts was, as I told the General a fortnight later, the purchase of a refining plant near Clarksburg, and the beginning of a lively war with the competitors in the business.

"We're going to sweep the South, General, with the help of the railroad," I said.

The great man, with his gouty foot in a felt slipper, sat gazing meditatively over the words of a telegram, which had come on his private wire.

"Midland stock is selling at 160," he said. "It's a big railroad, my boy, and I've made it."

Even to-day, with the living presence of Sally still in my eyes, I was filled again with the old unappeasable desire for the great railroad. The woman and the road were distinct and yet blended in my thoughts.

At dinner-time, when the General hobbled to his buggy on my arm, I made again the remark I had blurted out so inopportunely.

"General, I've been to West Virginia and started the plant, and we're going to give Hail Columbia to our competitors."

He looked at me attentively, and a sly twinkle appeared in his little watery grey eyes, which were sunk deep in the bluish and swollen sockets.

"Do you feel yourself getting big, Ben?" he enquired, with a chuckle.

I shook my head. "Not yet, but it's a fair risk and a good chance to make a big business."

"Well, you're right, I suppose, and if you ain't you'll find out before long. What's luck, after all, but the thing that enables a man to see a long way ahead?"

He settled himself under his fur rug, flicked the reins over the old grey horse, and we drove slowly up Main Street behind a street car.

"I don't know about luck, General, but I'm going to win out if hard pushing can do it."

"It can do 'most anything if you only push hard enough. But you talk as if you were in love, Ben. I've said the same thing a hundred times in my day, I reckon."

I blushed furiously, and then turning my face from him, stared at a group of children upon the sidewalk.

"Whom could I marry, General?" I asked. "You know well enough that a woman in your class wouldn't marry a man in mine — unless —"

"Unless she were over head and heels in love with him," he chuckled.

"Unless he were a great man," I corrected.

"You mean a rich man, Ben? So your oil business is merely a little love attention, after all."

"No, money has very little to do with it, and the woman I want to marry wouldn't marry me for money. But it's the mettle that counts, and in this age, given the position I've started from, how can a man prove his mettle except by success? — and success does mean money. The president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad is obliged to be a rich man, isn't he?"

"So you're still after my job, eh? Is that why you've let me bully and badger you for the last six years?"

"It was at the bottom of it," I answered honestly, for the gay old bird liked downright speaking, and I knew it. "I'd rather have been your confidential secretary for six years than general manager of traffic. I was learning what I wanted to know."

"And what was that?"

"The way you did things. The way you handled men and bought and sold stocks."

"You like the road, too, eh?"

"I like the road as long as it can be of use to me."

"And when it ceases to be you'll throw it over?"

"Yes, if it ever ceases to be I'll throw it over — honestly," I answered.

"Now that's the thing," he said, "remember always that in handling men honesty is a big asset. I've always been honest, my boy, and it's helped me when I needed it. Why, when I came in and got control of the road in that slump after the war, I was able to reorganise it principally because of the reputation for honesty I had earned. It was a long time before it began to pay dividends, but nobody grumbled. They knew I was doing my best — and that I was doing it fair and square, and to-day we control nearly twenty thousand miles of road."

"Yes, honesty I've learned in your office, sir."

"Well, it's good training, — it's mighty good training, if I do say it myself. You could have got with a darn bloater like Dick Horseley, and he'd have worked your ruin. Now you never saw me lose my head, did you, eh, Ben?"

I replied that I had not — not even when his private wire had ticked off news of the last panic.

"Well, I never did," he said reflectively, "except with women. Take my advice, Ben, and find a good sensible wife, even if she's in your own class, and marry and settle down. It steadies a man, somehow. I'd be a long ways happier to-day," he added, a little wistfully, "if I'd taken a wife when I was young."

I thought of Miss Matoaca, with her bright brown eyes, her withered roseleaf cheeks, and her sacrifice in the cause of honour.

"Whatever you are don't be an old bachelor," he pursued after a pause, "it may be pleasant in the beginning, but I'll be blamed if it pays in the end. Find a good sensible woman who hasn't any opinions of her own, and you will be happy. But as you value your peace, don't go and fall in love with a woman who has any heathenish ideas in her head. When a woman once gets that maggot in her brain, she stops believing in gentleness and self-sacrifice, and by George, she ceases to be a woman. Every man knows there's got to be a lot of sacrifice in marriage, and he likes to feel that he's marrying a woman who is fully capable of making it. A strong-minded woman can't — she's gone and unsexed herself — and instead of taking pleasure in giving up, she begins to talk everlastingly about her 'honour.' Pshaw! the next thing she'll expect to be treated as punctiliously as if she were a business partner!"

The old wound still ached sometimes, it was easy to see; and because of his age and his growing infirmities, he found it harder to keep back the querulous complaints that rose to his lips.

"Now, there's that George of mine," he resumed, still fretting, "he's probably gone and set his eyes on Sally Mickleborough, and it's as plain as daylight that she's got a plenty of that outlandish spirit of her aunt's. I don't mean she's got her notions — I ain't saying any harm of the girl — she's handsome enough in spite of Hatty's nonsense about her mouth — and

I call it downright scandalous of Edmund Bland to leave every last penny of his money away from her. But, mark my words, and I tell George so every single day I live, if she marries George he's going to have trouble as sure as shot. She's just the kind to expect him to make sacrifices, and by Jove, no man wants to be expected to make sacrifices in his own home!"

Sacrifices! My blood sang in my ears. If she would only marry me I'd promise to make a sacrifice for her every blessed minute that I lived.

"And do you think she likes George, General?" I asked timidly.

"Oh, I don't suppose she knows her own mind," he retorted. "I never in my life, sir, knew but one woman who did."

We drove on for a minute in silence, and from the red and watery look in the General's eyes, I inferred that, in spite of his broken engagement and his bitter judgment, Miss Matoaca had managed to retain her place in his memory. As I looked at him, sitting there like a wounded eagle, huddled under his fur rug, a feeling of thanksgiving that was almost one of rapture swelled in my heart. If I had a plain name, I had also a clean life to offer the woman I loved. When I remembered the strong, pure line of her features, her broad, intelligent brow, her clear, unswerving gaze, I told myself that whatever the world had to say, she, at least, would consider the difference a fair one. At the great moment she would choose me, I knew, for myself alone; choose in a democracy the man who, God helping him, would stand always for

the best in the democratic spirit — for courage and truth and strength and a clean honour toward men and women.

"Who was that pretty girl, Ben," the General enquired presently, "I saw you walking with last Sunday? A sweetheart?"

"No, sir. My sister."

"A lady? She looked it."

"She has been taught like one."

"What'll you do with her? Marry her off?"

"I haven't thought — but she won't look at any of the men she knows."

"Oh, well, if the National Oil wins, you may give her a fortune. There are plenty of young chaps who would jump at her. Bless my soul, she's more to my taste than Sally Mickleborough. It's the women who are such fools about birth, you know, men don't care a rap. Why, if I'd loved a woman, she might have been born in the poorhouse for all the thought I'd have given it. A pretty face or a small foot goes a long sight farther with a man than the tallest grandfather that ever lived." For a moment he was silent, and then he spoke softly, unconscious that he uttered his thought aloud. "No, Matoaca's birth, whatever it might have been, couldn't have come between us — it was her damned principles."

He looked tired and old, now that his armour of business had dropped from him, as he sat there, with the fur rug drawn over his chest, and his loose lower lip hanging slightly away from his shrunken gums. A sudden pity, the first I had ever dared feel for the president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic

Railroad, shot through my heart. The gay old bird I told myself, was shedding his plumage at last.

"Well, as long as I can't rest on my birth, I might as well stand up on something," I said.

"Women think a lot of it," he resumed, as if he had not noticed my flippant interjection; "and I reckon it about fits the size of their minds. Why, to hear Miss Mitty Bland talk you would think good birth was the only virtue she admitted to the first rank. I was telling her about you," he added with a chuckle, "and you've got sense enough to see the humour of what she said."

"I hope I have, General."

"Well, I began it by boasting about your looks, Ben, if you don't mind. 'That wonderful boy of ours is the finest-looking fellow in the South to-day, Miss Mitty,' I burst out, 'and he stands six feet two in his stockings.' 'Ah, General,' she replied sadly, 'what are six feet two inches without a grandfather?'"

He threw back his head with a roar, appearing a trifle chagrined the next instant by my faint-hearted pretence of mirth.

"Doesn't it tickle you, Ben?" he enquired, checking his laughter.

"I'm afraid it makes me rather angry, General," I answered.

"Oh, well, I didn't think you'd take it seriously. It's just a joke, you know. Go ahead and make your fortune, and they'll receive you quick enough."

"But they have received me. They asked me to their party."

"That was Sally, my boy — it was her party, and

she fought the ladies for you. That girl's a born fighter, and I reckon she gets it from Harry Mickleborough — for the only blessed thing he could do was to fight. He was a mighty poor man, was Harry, but a God Almighty soldier — and he sent more Yankees to glory than any single man in the whole South. The girl gets it from him, and she hasn't any of her aunts' aristocratic nonsense in her either. She told Miss Mitty, on the spot, and I can see her eyes shine now, that she liked you and she meant to know you."

"That she meant to know me," I repeated, with a singing heart.

"The ladies were put out, I could see, but they ain't a match for that scamp Harry, and he's in her. There never lived the general that could command him, and he'd have been shot for insubordination in '63 if he hadn't been as good as a whole company to the army. 'I'll fight for the South and welcome,' he used to say, 'but, by God, sir, I'll fight as I damn please.' 'Twas the same way about the church, too. Old Dr. Peterson got after him once about standing, instead of kneeling, during prayers, and 'I'll pray as I damn please, sir!' responded Harry. Oh, he was a sad scamp!"

"So his daughter fought for me?" I said. "How did it end?"

"It will end all right when you are president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad, and have shipped me to Kingdom Come. They won't shut their doors in your face, then."

"But she stood up for me?" I asked, and my voice trembled.

"She? Do you mean Miss Matoaca? Well, she granted your good looks and your virtues, but she regretted that they couldn't ask you to their house."

"And Miss Mitty?"

"Oh, Miss Mitty assured me that six feet two were as an inch in her sight, without a grandfather."

"But her niece — Miss Mickleborough?" I had worked delicately up to my point.

"The girl fought for you — but then she's obliged to fight for something — it's Harry in her. That's why, as I said to George at breakfast, I don't want him to marry her. She's a good girl, and I like her, but who in the deuce wants to marry a fighting wife? Look at that fellow mauling his horse, Ben. It makes me sick to see 'em do it, but it's no business of mine, I reckon."

"It is of mine, General," I replied, for the sight of an ill-treated animal had made my blood boil since childhood. Before he could answer, I had jumped over the moving wheel, and had reached the miserable, sore-backed horse struggling under a load of coal and a big stick.

"Come off and put your shoulder to the wheel, you drunken brute," I said, as my rage rose in my throat.

"I'll be damned if I will," replied the fellow, and he was about to begin belabouring again, when I seized him by the collar and swung him clear to the street.

"I'll be damned if you don't," I retorted.

I was a strong man, and when my passions were roused, the thought of my own strength slipped from my consciousness.

"You'll break his bones, Ben," said the General, leaning out of his buggy, but his eyes shone as they might have shone at the sight of his first battle.

"I hope I shall," I responded grimly, and going over to the wagon I put my shoulder to the wheel, and began the ascent of the steep hill. Somebody on the pavement came to my help on the other side, and we went up slowly, with a half-drunken driver reeling at our sides and the General following, in his buggy, a short way behind.

"I thought you were a diffident fellow, Ben," remarked the great man, as I took my seat again by his side; "but I don't believe there's another man in Richmond that would make such a spectacle of himself."

"I forget myself when I'm worked up," I answered, "and I forget that anybody is looking."

"Well, somebody was," he replied slyly. "You didn't see Miss Matoaca Bland pass you in a carriage as you were pushing that wheel?"

"No, I didn't see anybody."

"She saw you — and so did Sally Mickleborough. Why, I'd have given something pretty in my day to make a girl's eyes blaze like that."

A week later I swallowed my pride, with an effort, and called at the old grey house at the hour of sunset. Selim, stepping softly, conducted me into the dimly lighted drawing-room, where a cedar log burned, with a delicious fragrance, on a pair of high brass andirons. The red glow, half light, half shadow, flickered over the quaint tapestried furniture, the white-painted woodwork, and the portraits of departed Blands and

Fairfaxes that smiled gravely down, with averted eyes. In a massive gilt frame over a rosewood spinet there was a picture of Miss Mitty and Miss Mataoca, painted in fancy dress, with clasped hands, under a garland of roses. My gaze was upon it, when the sound of a door opening quickly somewhere in the rear came to my ears; and the next instant I heard Miss Mitty's prim tones saying distinctly: —

"Tell Mr. Starr, Selim, that the ladies are not receiving."

There was a moment's silence, followed by a voice that brought my delighted heart with a bound into my throat.

"Aunt Mitty, I *will* see him."

"Sally, how can you receive a man who was not born a gentleman?"

"Aunt Mitty, if you don't let me see him here, I'll — I'll meet him in the street."

The door shut sharply, there was a sound of rapid steps, and the voices ceased. Harry Mickleborough, in his daughter, I judged, had gained the victory; for an instant afterwards I heard her cross the hall, with a defiant and energetic rustle of skirts. When she entered the room, and held out her hand, I saw that she was dressed in her walking gown. There were soft brown furs about her throat, and on her head she wore a small fur hat, with a bunch of violets at one side, under a thin white veil.

"I was just going to walk," she said, breathing a little quickly, while her eyes, very wide and bright, held that puzzled and resolute look I remembered; "will you come with me?"

She turned at once to the door, as if eager to leave the house, and while I followed her through the hall, and down the short flight of steps to the pavement, I was conscious of a sharp presentiment that I should never again cross that threshold.

CHAPTER XV

A MEETING IN THE ENCHANTED GARDEN

I SPOKE no word of love in that brisk walk up Franklin Street, and when I remembered this a month afterwards, it seemed to me that I had let the opportunity of a lifetime slip by. Since that afternoon I had not seen Sally again — some fierce instinct held me back from entering the doors that would have closed against me — and as the days passed, crowded with work and cheered by the immediate success of the National Oil Company, I felt that Miss Mitty and Miss Matoaca, and even Sally, whom I loved, had faded out of the actual world into a vague cloud-like horizon. To women it is given, I suppose, to merge the ideal into everyday life, but with men it is different. I saw Sally still every minute that I lived, but I saw her as a star, set high above the common business world in which I had my place — above the strain and stress of the General's office, above the rise and fall of the stock market, above the brisk triumphant war with competitors for the National Oil Company, above even the hope of the future presidency of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad. Between my love and its fulfilment, stretched, I knew, hard years of struggle, but bred in me, bone and structure, the instinct of democracy was still strong

enough to support me in the hour of defeat. Never once — not even when I sat, condescendingly plied with coffee and partridges, face to face with the wonder expressed in Miss Mitty's eyes, had I admitted to myself that I was obliged to remain in the class from which I had sprung. Courage I had never lost for an instant; the present might embarrass me, but the future, I felt always, I held securely grasped in my own hands. The birthright of a Republic was mine as well as the General's, and I knew that among a free people it was the mettle of the man that would count in the struggle. In the fight between democratic ideals and Old World institutions I had no fear, even to-day, of what the future would bring. The right of a man to make his own standing was all that I asked.

And yet the long waiting! As I walked one Sunday afternoon over to Church Hill, after a visit to Jessy (who was living now with a friend of the doctor's), I asked myself again and again if Sally had read my heart that last afternoon and had seen in it the reason of my fierce reserve. Jessy had been affectionate and very pretty — she was a cold, small, blond woman, with a perfect face and the manner of an indifferent child — but she had been unable to wean me from the thought which returned to take royal possession as soon as the high pressure of my working day was relaxed. It controlled me utterly from the moment I put the question of the stock market aside; and it was driving me now, like the ghost of an unhappy lover, back for a passionate hour in the enchanted garden.

The house was half closed when I reached it, though

the open shutters to the upper windows led me to believe that some of the rooms, at least, were tenanted. When I entered the gate and passed the stuccoed wing to the rear piazza, I saw that the terraces were blotted and ruined as if an invading army had tramped over them. The magnolias and laburnums, with the exception of a few lonely trees, had already fallen; the latticed arbours were slowly rotting away; and several hardy rose-bushes, blooming bravely in the overgrown squares, were the only survivals of the summer splendour that I remembered. Turning out of the path, I plucked one of these gallant roses, and found it pale and sickly, with a November blight at the heart. Only the great elms still arched their bared branches unchanged against a red sunset; and now as then the small yellow leaves fluttered slowly down, like wounded butterflies, to the narrow walks.

I had left the upper terrace and had descended the sunken green steps, when the dry rustle of leaves in the path fell on my ears, and turning a fallen summer house, I saw Sally approaching me through the broken maze of the box. A colour flamed in her face, and pausing in the leaf-strewn path, she looked up at me with shining and happy eyes.

"It has been so long since I saw you," she said, with her hand outstretched.

I took her hand, and turning we moved down the walk while I still held it in mine. Out of the blur of her figure, which swam in a mist, I saw only her shining and happy eyes.

"It has been a thousand years," I answered, "but I knew that they would pass."

"That they would pass?" she repeated.

"That they must pass. I have worked for that end every minute since I saw you. I have loved you, as you surely know," I blurted out, "every instant of my life, but I knew that I could offer you nothing until I could offer you something worthy of your acceptance."

Reaching out her hand, which she had withdrawn from mine, she caught several drifting elm leaves in her open palm.

"And what," she asked slowly, "do you consider to be worthy of my acceptance?"

"A name," I answered, "that you would be proud to bear. Not only the love of a man's soul and body, but the soul and body themselves after they have been tried and tested. Wealth, I know, would not count with you, and I believe, birth would not, even though you are a Bland — but I must have wealth, I must have honour, so that at least you will not appear to stoop. I must give you all that it lies in my power to achieve, or I must give you nothing."

"Wealth! honour!" she said, with a little laugh, "O Ben Starr! Ben Starr!"

"So that, at least, you will not appear to stoop," I repeated.

"I stoop to you?" she responded, and again she laughed.

"You know that I love you?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied, and lifted her eyes to mine, "I know that you love me."

"Beyond love I have nothing at the moment."

A light wind swept the leaves from her hand, and blew the ends of her white veil against my breast.

"And suppose," she demanded in a clear voice, "that love was all that I wanted?"

Her lashes did not tremble; but in her eyes, in her parted red lips, and in her whole swift and expectant figure, there was something noble and free, as if she were swept forward by the radiant purpose which shone in her look.

"Not my love — not yet — my darling," I said.

At the word her blush came.

"You say you have only yourself to give," she went on with an effort. "Is it possible that in the future — in any future — you could have more than yourself?"

"Not more love, Sally, not more love."

"Then more of what?"

"Of things that other men and women count worth the having!"

The sparkle returned to her eyes, and I watched the old childish archness play in her face.

"Do I understand that you are proposing to other men and women or to me, sir?" she enquired, above her muff, in the prim tone of Miss Mitty.

"To neither the one nor the other," I answered stubbornly, though I longed to kiss the mockery away from her curving lips. "When the time comes I shall return to you."

"And you are doing this for the sake of other people, not for me," she said. "I suppose, indeed, that it's Aunt Mitty and Aunt Matoaca you are putting before me. They would be flattered, I am sure, if they could only know of it — but they can't. As a matter of fact, they also put something before me, so I don't appear to come first with anybody. Aunt Mitty prefers her

pride and Aunt Matoaca prefers her principles, and you prefer both — "

"I am only twenty-six," I returned. "In five years — in ten at most — I shall be far in the race — "

"And quite out of breath with the running," she observed, "by the time you turn and come back for me."

"I don't dare ask you to wait for me."

"As a matter of fact," she responded serenely, "I don't think I shall. I could never endure waiting."

Her calmness was like a dash of cold water into my face.

"Don't laugh at me whatever you do," I implored.

"I'm not laughing — it's far too serious," she retorted. "That scheme of yours," she flashed out suddenly, "is worthy of the great brain of the General."

"Now I'll stand anything but that!" I replied, and turned squarely on her; "Sally, do you love me?"

"Love a man who puts both his pride and his principles before me?"

"If you don't love me — and, of course you can't — why do you torment me?"

"It isn't torment, it's education. When next you start to propose to the lady of your choice, don't begin by telling her you are lovesick for the good opinion of her maiden aunts."

"Sally, Sally!" I cried joyfully. My hand went out to hers, and then as she turned away — my arm was about her, and the little fur hat with the bunch of violets was on my breast.

"O, Ben Starr, were you born blind?" she said with a sob.

"Sally, am I mad or do you love me?" I asked, and the next instant, bending over as she looked up, I kissed her parted lips.

For a minute she was silent, as if my kiss had drawn her strength through her tremulous red mouth. Her body quivered and seemed to melt in my arms — and then with a happy laugh, she yielded herself to my embrace.

"A little of both, Ben," she answered, "you are mad, I suppose, and so am I — and I love you."

"But how could you? When did you begin?"

"I could because I would, and there was no beginning. I was born that way."

"You meant you have cared for me, as I have for you — always?"

"Not always, perhaps — but — well, it started in the churchyard, I think, when I gave you Samuel. Then when I met you again it might have been just the way you look — for oh, Ben, did you ever discover that you are splendid to look at?"

"A magnificent animal," I retorted.

She blushed, recognising the phrase. "To tell the truth, though, it wasn't the way you look," she went on impulsively, "it was, I think, — I am quite sure, — the time you pushed that wheel up the hill. I adored you, Ben, at that moment. If you'd asked me to marry you on the spot I'd have responded, 'Yes, thank you, sir,' as one of my great-grandmothers did at the altar."

"And to think I didn't even know you were

there. I'd forgotten it, but I remember now the General told me I made a spectacle of myself."

"Well, I always liked a spectacle, it's in my blood. I like a man, too, who does things as if he didn't care whether anybody was looking at him or not — and that's you, Ben."

"It's not my business to shatter your ideals," I answered, and the next minute, "O Sally, how is it to end?"

"That depends, doesn't it," she asked, "whether you want to marry me or my maiden aunts?"

"Do you mean that you will marry me?"

"I mean, Ben, that if you aren't so obliging as to marry me, I'll pine away and die a lovelorn death."

"Be serious, Sally."

"Could anything on earth be more serious than a lovelorn death?"

I would have caught her back to my breast, but eluding my arms, she stood poised like the fleeting spirit of gaiety in the little path.

"Will you promise to marry me, Ben Starr?" she asked.

"I'll promise anything on earth," I answered.

"Not to talk any more about my stooping to a giant?"

"I won't talk about it, darling, I'll let you do it."

"And if you're poor you'll let me be poor too? And if you're rich you'll give me a share of the money?"

"Both — all."

"And you'll make a sacrifice for me — as the General said George wouldn't — whenever I happen particularly to want one?"

"A million of them — anything, everything."

She came a step nearer, and raised her smiling lips to mine.

"Anything — everything, Ben, together," she said.

Presently we walked back slowly, hand in hand, through the maze of box.

"Will you tell your aunts, or shall I, Sally?" I asked.

"We'll go to them together."

"Now, at this instant?"

"Now — at this instant," she agreed, "but I thought you were so patient?"

"Patient? I'm as patient as an engine on the Great South Midland."

"A minute ago you were prepared to wait ten years."

"Oh, ten years!" I echoed, as I followed her out of the enchanted garden.

At the corner the surrey was standing, and the face of old Shadrach, the negro driver, stared back at me, transfixed with amazement.

"Whar you gwine now, Miss Sally?" he demanded defiantly of his young mistress, as I took my place under the fur rug beside her.

"Home, Uncle Shadrach," she replied.

"Ain't I gwine drap de gent'man somewhar on de way up?"

"No, Uncle Shadrach, home," — and for home we started merrily with a flick of the whip over the backs of the greys.

Sitting beside her for the first time in my life, I was conscious, as we drove through the familiar streets, only of an acute physical delight in her presence. As she turned toward me, her breath fanned my cheek, the

touch of her arm on mine was a rapture, and when the edge of her white veil was blown into my face, I felt my blood rush to meet it. Never before had I been so confident, so strong, so assured of the future. Not the future alone, but the whole universe seemed to lie in the closed palm of my hand. I knew that I was plain, that I was rough beside the velvet softness of the woman who had promised to share my life; but this plainness, this roughness, no longer troubled me since she had found in it something of the power that had drawn her to me. My awkwardness had dropped from me in the revelation of my strength which she had brought. The odour of burning leaves floated up from the street, and I saw again her red shoes dancing over the sunken graves in the churchyard. Oh, those red shoes had danced into my life and would stay there forever!

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH SALLY SPEAKS HER MIND

We crossed the threshold, which I had thought never to pass again, and entered the drawing-room, where a cedar log burned on the andirons. At either end of the low brass fender, Miss Mitty and Miss Matoaca sat very erect, like two delicate silhouettes, the red light of the flames shining through their fine, almost transparent profiles. Beyond them, over the rosewood spinet, I saw their portrait, painted in fancy dress, with clasped hands under a garland of roses.

As we entered the room, they rose slightly from their chairs, and turned toward us with an expression of mild surprise on their faces. It was impossible, I knew, for their delicately moulded features to express any impulse more strongly.

"Dear aunties," began Sally, in a voice that was a caress, "I've brought Ben back with me because I met him in the garden on Church Hill — and — and — and he told me that he loved me."

"He told you that he loved you?" repeated Miss Mitty in a high voice, while Miss Matoaca sat speechless, with her unnaturally bright eyes on her niece's face.

Kneeling on the rug at their feet, Sally looked from one to the other with an appealing and tender glance.

"You brought him back because he told you that he loved you?" said Miss Mitty again, as if her closed mind had refused to admit the words she had uttered.

"Well, only partly because of that, Aunt Mitty," replied Sally bravely, "the rest was because — because I told him that I loved him."

For a moment there was a tense and unnatural silence in the midst of which I heard the sharp crackling of the fire and smelt the faint sweet smell of the burning cedar. The two aunts looked at each other over the kneeling girl, and it seemed to me that the long, narrow faces had grown suddenly pinched and old.

"I — I don't think we understood quite what you said, Sally dear," said Miss Matoaca, in a hesitating voice; and I felt sorry for her as she spoke — sorry for them both because the edifice of their beliefs and traditions, reared so patiently through the centuries by dead Fairfaxes and Blands, had crumbled about their ears.

"What she means, Miss Matoaca," I said gently, coming forward into the firelight, "is that I have asked her to marry me."

"To marry you — you — Ben Starr?" exclaimed Miss Mitty abruptly, rising from her chair, and then falling nervelessly back. "There is some mistake — not that I doubt," she added courteously, the generations of breeding overcoming her raw impulse of horror, "not that I doubt for a minute that you are an estimable and deserving character — General Bolingbroke tells me so and I trust his word. But Sally marry you! Why, your father — I beg your pardon

for reminding you of it — your father was not even an educated man."

"No," I replied, "my father was not an educated man, but I am."

"That speaks very well for you, sir, I am sure — but how — how could my niece marry a man who — I apologise again for alluding to your origin — whose father was a stone-cutter — I have heard?"

"Yes, he was a stone-cutter, and I am sorry to say wasn't even a good one."

"I don't know that good or bad makes a difference, except, of course, as it affected his earning a livelihood. But the fact remains that he was a common workman and that no member of our family on either side has ever been even remotely connected with trade. Surely, you yourself, Mr. Starr, must be aware that my niece and you are not in the same walk of life. Do you not realise the impossibility of — of the connection you speak of?"

"I realised it so much," I answered, "that until I met her this afternoon I had determined to wait five — perhaps ten years before asking her to become my wife."

"Ten years? But what can ten years have to do with it? Families are not made in ten years, Mr. Starr, and how could that length of time alter the fact that your father was a person of no education and that you yourself are a self-made man?"

"I am not ashamed to offer her the man after he is made," I replied. "What I did not think worthy of her was the man in the making."

"But it is the man in the making that I want," said

Sally, rising to her feet, and taking my hand in hers. "O Aunt Matoaca, I love him!"

The little lady to whom she appealed bent slowly forward in the firelight, her face, which had grown old and wan, looking up at us, as we stood there, hand in hand, on the rug.

"I am distressed for you, Sally," she said, "but when it becomes a question of honour, love must be sacrificed."

"Honour!" cried Sally, and there was a passionate anger in her voice, "but I *do* honour him." My hand was in hers, and she stooped and kissed it before turning to Miss Matoaca, who had drawn herself up, thin and straight as a blade, in her chair.

"You are right," I said, "to tell me that I am unworthy of your niece — for I am. I am plain and rough beside her, but, at least, I am honest. What I offer her is a man's heart, and a man's hand that has dealt cleanly and fairly with both men and women."

Until the words were uttered my pride had blinded me to my cruelty. Then I saw two bright red spots appear in Miss Matoaca's thin cheeks, and I asked myself in anger if the General or George Bolingbroke would have been guilty of so deep a thrust? Did she dream that I knew her story? And were those pathetic red spots the outward sign of a stab in her gentle bosom?

"There are many different kinds of merit, Mr. Starr," she returned, with a wistful dignity. "I do not undervalue that of character, but I do not think that even a good character can atone for the absence of family inheritance — of the qualities which come from refined

birth and breeding. We have had the misfortune in our family of one experience of an ill-assorted and tragic marriage," she added.

"We must never forget poor Sarah's misery and ours, Sister Matoaca," remarked Miss Mitty, from the opposite side of the hearth; "and yet Harry Mickleborough's father was a most respectable man, and the teacher of Greek in a college."

All the pity went out of me, and I felt only a blind sense of irritation at the artificial values, the feminine lack of grasp, the ignorance of the true proportions of life. I grew suddenly hard, and something of this hardness passed into my voice when I spoke.

"I stand or fall by own worth and by that alone," I returned, "and your niece, if she marries me, will stand or fall as I do. I ask no favours, no allowances, even from her."

Withdrawing her hand from mine, Sally took a single step forward, and stood with her eyes on the faces that showed so starved and wan in the firelight.

"Don't you see — oh, can't you see," she asked, "that it is because of these very things that I love him? How can I separate his past from what he is to-day? How can I say that I would have this or that different — his birth, his childhood, his struggle — when all these have helped to make him the man I love? Who else have I ever known that could compare with him for a minute? You wanted me to marry George Bolingbroke, but what has he ever done to prove what he was worth?"

"Sally, Sally," said Miss Mitty, sternly, "he had no need to prove it. It was proved centuries before his

birth. The Bolingbrokes proved themselves to their king before this was a country — "

"Well, I'm not his king," rejoined Sally, scornfully, "so it wasn't proved to me. I ask something more."

"More, Sally?"

"Yes, more, Aunt Mitty, a thousand times and ten thousand times. What do I care for a dead arm that fought for a dead king? Both are dust to-day, and I am alive. No, no, give me, not honour and loyalty that have been dead five hundred years, but truth and courage that I can turn to to-day, — not chivalric phrases that are mere empty sound, but honesty and a strong arm that I can lean on."

Miss Matoaca's head had dropped as if from weariness over her thin breast, which palpitated under the piece of old lace, like the breast of a wounded bird. Then, as the girl stopped and caught her breath sharply from sheer stress of feeling, the little lady looked up again and straightened herself with a gesture of pride.

"Do not make the mistake, Sally," she said, "of thinking that a humble birth means necessarily greater honesty than a high one. Generations of refinement are the best material for character-building, and you might as easily find the qualities you esteem in a gentleman of your own social position."

"I might, Aunt Matoaca; but, as a matter of fact, have I? Until you have seen a man fight can you know him? Is family tradition, after all, as good a school as the hard world? A life like Ben's does not always make a man good, I know, but it has made him so. If this were not true — if any one could prove to me that he had been false or cruel to any living creature

— man, woman, or animal — I'd give him up to-day and not break my heart — "

It was true, I knew it as she spoke, and I could have knelt to her.

"You are blind, Sally, blind and rash as your mother before you," returned Miss Mitty.

"No, Aunt Mitty, it is you who are blind — who see by the old values that the world has long since outgrown — who think you can assign a place to a man and say to him, 'You belong there and cannot come out of it.' But, oh, Aunt Matoaca, surely you, who have sacrificed so much for what you believe to be right, — who have placed principle before any claims of blood, surely you will uphold me — "

"My child, my child," replied the poor lady, with a sob, "I placed principle first, but never emotion — never emotion."

"Poor Sarah was the only one of us who gave up everything for the sake of an emotion," added Miss Mitty, "and what did it bring her except misery?"

Our cause was lost — we saw it at the same instant — and again Sally gave me her hand and stood side by side with me in the firelight.

"I am sorry, dear aunts," she said gently, and turning to me, she added slowly and clearly, "I will marry you a year from to-day, if you will wait, Ben."

"I will wait for you, whether you marry me or not, forever," I answered; and bowing silently, I turned and left the room, while Sally went down again on her knees.

Once outside, I drew a long breath of air, sharp with the scent of the sycamore, and stood gazing up at the clear sunset beyond the silvery boughs. It was good to

be out of those mouldering traditions, that atmosphere of an all-enveloping past; good, too, to be out of the tapestried room, away from the grave, fixed smiles of the dead Blands and Fairfaxes and the close, sweet smell of the burning cedar. There I dared not step with my full weight, lest I should ruthlessly tread on a sentiment, or bring down a moth-eaten tradition upon my head. I was for the hard, bright world, and the future; there in that cedar-scented room, sat the two ladies, forever guarding the faded furniture and the crumbling past. The pathetic contradiction of Miss Matoaca returned to me, and I laughed aloud. Miss Matoaca, who worked for the emancipation of women, while she herself was the slave of an ancestry of men who oppressed women, and women who loved oppression! Miss Matoaca, whose mind, long and narrow like her face, could grasp but a single idea and reject the sequence to which it inevitably led! I wondered if she meant to emancipate "ladies" merely, or if her principles could possibly overleap her birthright of caste? Was she a gallant martyr to the inequalities of sex, who still clung, trembling, to the inequalities of society? She would go to the stake, I felt sure, for the cause of womanhood, but she would go supported by the serene conviction that she was "a lady." The pathos of it, and the mockery, checked the laugh in my throat. To how many of us, after all, was it given to discern, not only immediate effects, but universal relations as well? To the General? To myself? What did we see except the possible opportunity, the room for the ego, the adjustment to selfish ends? Yet our school was the world. Should we, then, expect that little lady,

with her bright eyes and her withered roseleaf cheeks, to look farther than the scented firelight in which she sat? I felt a tenderness for her, as I felt a tenderness for all among whom Sally moved. The house in which she lived, the threshold she had crossed, the servants who surrounded her, were all bathed for me in the rosy light of her lamps. Common day did not shine there. I was but twenty-seven, and my eyes could still find romance in the rustle of her skirt and in the curl of her eyelash.

In the little office, where the curtains were drawn and the green-shaded lamp already lit, I found Dr. Theophilus sitting over his evening mint julep, the solitary dissipation in which I had ever seen him indulge. His strong, ruddy face, with its hooked nose and illuminating smile, was still the face of a middle-aged man, though he had passed, a year ago, his seventieth birthday. At his feet, Waif, a stray dog, rescued in memory of Robin, the pointer, was curled up on a rug.

"Well, my boy," he said cheerily, "you've had a good day, I hope?"

"A good day, doctor, I've been in heaven," I answered.

His smile shone out, clear and bright, as it did at a patient's bedside. "I've been there, too, Ben," he responded, "forty years ago."

"Then why didn't you stay, sir?"

"Because it isn't given to any man to stay longer than a few minutes. Ah, my boy, you are the mixture of a fighter and a dreamer."

"But suppose," I blushed, for I was a reserved man, though few people were reserved with Dr. Theophilus, "suppose that your heaven is a woman?"

"Has it ever been anything else to a man since Adam?" he asked. "Every man's heaven, and most men's hell, is a woman, my boy. Why, look at old George Bolingbroke now! He's no longer young, and he's certainly no longer handsome, yet I've seen him, in his day, stand up straight and tall in church at Miss Matoaca Bland's side, and look perfectly happy because he could sing from the same hymn-book. Then a week later, when she'd thrown him over, I saw him jump up at a supper, and drink champagne out of the slipper of some variety actress."

"Yet she was right, I suppose, to throw him over?"

"Oh, she was right, I'm not questioning that she was right," he responded hastily; "but it isn't always the woman who is right, Ben," he added, "that makes a man's heaven."

"The poor little lady had no slipperful of champagne to fall back on," I suggested.

"It's a pity she hadn't — for it's as true as the Gospel, that George Bolingbroke drove her into all this nonsense about the equality of sexes. Equality, indeed! A man doesn't want to make love to an equal, but to an angel! Bless my soul, I don't know to save my life, what to think of Miss Matoaca, except that she's crazy. That's the kindest thing I can say for her. She's gone now and got into correspondence with some bloodthirsty, fire-eating woman's rights advocates up North, and she's actually taken to distributing their indecent pamphlets. She had the face to leave one on my desk this morning. I'd just taken it in the tongs before you came in and put it into the fire. There are the ashes of it," he added sardonically, waving his

silver goblet in the direction of some grey shreds of paper in the fireplace.

"All the same, doctor, she may be crazy, but I respect her."

"Respect her? Respect Miss Matoaca Bland? Of course you respect her, sir. Even George Bolingbroke, bitter as he is, respects her from his boots up. She's the embodiment of honour, and if there's a man alive who doesn't respect the embodiment of honour, be it male or female, he ought — he ought to be taken out and horsewhipped, sir! Her own sister, poor Miss Mitty, has the greatest veneration for her, though she can't help lying awake at night and wondering where those crazy principles will lead her next. If they lead her to a quagmire, she'll lift her skirts and step in, Ben, there's no doubt of that — and what Miss Mitty fears now is that, since she's got hold of these abolition sheets, they'll lead her to the public platform —"

"You mean she'd get up and speak in public? She couldn't to save her head."

"You'd better not conclude that Miss Matoaca can't do anything until you've seen her try it," replied the doctor indignantly. "I suppose you'd think she couldn't bombard a political meeting, with not a woman to help her. Yet last winter she went down to the Legislature, in her black silk dress and poke bonnet, and tried to get her obnoxious measures brought before a committee."

"Was she laughed at?" I demanded angrily.

"Good Lord, no. They are gentlemen, even if they are politicians, and they know a lady even if she's cracked."

"And is she entirely alone? Has she no supporter?"

"As far as I know, my boy, Matoaca Bland is the only blessed thing in the state that cares a continental whether women are emancipated or not."

He lifted the silver goblet to his lips, and drank long and deeply, while the rustle of Mrs. Clay's skirts was heard at his office door. After a sharp rap, she entered in her bustling way, and presented me with a second julep, deliciously frosted and fragrant. She was a small, very alert old lady, wearing a bottle-green alpaca, made so slender in the waist that it caused her to resemble one of her own famous pickled cucumbers.

"Theophilus," she began in a crisp, high voice, "I hope you have sent in those bills, as you promised me?"

"Good Lord, Tina," responded the doctor, with a burst of irritation, "isn't it bad enough to be sick without being made to pay for it?"

"You promised me, Theophilus."

"I promised you I'd send bills to the folks I'd cured, but, when I came to think of it, how was I to know, Tina, that I'd cured any?"

"At least you dosed them?"

"Yes, I dosed them," he admitted; "but taking medicine isn't a pleasure that I'd like to pay for."

Turning away, she rustled indignantly through the door, and Dr. Theophilus, as he returned to the rim of his silver goblet, gave me a sly wink over his sprigs of mint.

"Yes, Ben, it isn't always the woman who is right that makes a man's heaven," he said.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH MY FORTUNES RISE

THE winter began with a heavy snow-storm and ended in a long April rain, and in all those swiftly moving months I had seen Sally barely a dozen times. Not only my pride, but Miss Mitty's rigid commands had kept me from her house, and the girl had promised that for the first six months she would not meet me except by chance.

"In the spring — oh, in the spring," she wrote, "I shall be free. My promise was given and I could not recall it, but I believe now that it was pride, not love, that made them exact it. Do you know, I sometimes think that they do not love me at all. They have both told me that they would rather see me dead than married, as they call it, beneath me. Beneath me, indeed! Ah, dearest, dearest, how can one lower one's self to a giant? When I think of all that you are, of all that you have made yourself, I feel so humble and proud. The truth is, Ben, I'm not suffering half so much from love as I am from indignation. If it keeps up, some day I'll burst out like Aunt Matoaca, for I've got it in me. And she of all people! Why, she goes about in her meek, sanctified manner distributing pamphlets on the emancipation of woman, and yet she actually told me the other day that, of course, she would prefer

to have only 'ladies' permitted to vote. 'In that case, however,' she added, 'I should desire to restrict the franchise to gentlemen, also.' Did you ever in your whole life hear of anything so absurd, and she really meant it. She's a martyr, and filled with a holy zeal to get burned or racked. But it's awful, every bit of it. Oh, lift me up, Ben! Lift me up!" And in a postscript, "What does the General say to you? Aunt Mitty has told the General."

The General had said nothing to me, but when I drove him up from his office the next day, he invited me to dine with him, and talked incessantly through the three simple courses about the prospects of the National Oil Company.

"So you're sweeping the whole South?" he said.

"Yes, Sam has made a big thing of it. We've knocked out everybody else in the oil business in this part of the world."

"Mark my word, then, you've been cutting into the interest of the oil trust, and it will come along presently and try to knock you out. When it does, Ben, make it pay, make it pay."

"Oh, I'll make it pay," I answered. "The consolidated interests may sweep out the independent companies, but they can't overturn the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad."

"It's the road, of course, that has made such success possible."

"Yes, it's the road—everything is the road, General."

"And to think that when I got control of it, it was bankrupt."

Rising from the table he took my arm, and limped

painfully into his study, where he lit a cigar and sank back in his easy chair.

"Look here, Ben," he began suddenly, with a change of tone, "what's this trouble brewing between you and Miss Mitty Bland?"

"There's no trouble, sir, except that her niece has promised to marry me."

"Promised to marry you, eh? Sally Mickleborough? Are you sure it's Sally Mickleborough?"

"I'm hardly likely to be mistaken, General, about the identity of my future wife."

"No, I suppose you ain't," he admitted, "but, good Lord, Ben, how did you make her do it?"

"I didn't make her. She was good enough to do it of her own accord."

"So she did it of her own accord? Well, confound you, boy, how did it ever occur to you to ask her?"

"That's what I can't answer, General, I don't believe it ever occurred to me any more than it occurred to me to fall in love with her."

"You've fallen in love with Sally Mickleborough, Miss Matoaca's niece. She refused George, you know?"

I replied that I didn't know it, but I never supposed that she would engage herself to two men at the same time.

"And she's seriously engaged to you?" he demanded, still unconvinced. "Are you precious sure she isn't flirting? Girls will flirt, and I don't reckon you've had much experience of 'em. Why, even Miss Mitty was known to flirt in a prim, stiff-necked fashion in her time, and as for Sarah Bland, they say she promised to marry a whole regiment before the battle of Seven

Pines. A little warning beforehand ain't going to do any harm, Ben."

"I'm much obliged to you, General, but I don't think in this case it's needed. Sally is staunch and true."

"Sally? Do you call her 'Sally'? It used to be the custom to address the lady you were engaged to as 'Miss Sally' up to the day of the marriage."

I laughed and shook my head. "Oh, we move fast!"

"Yes, I'm an old man," he admitted sadly, "and I was brought up in a different civilisation. It's funny, my boy, how many customs were swept away with the institution of slavery."

"There'd have been little room for me in those days."

"Oh, you'd have got into some places quick enough, but you'd never have crossed the Blands' threshold when they lived down on James River. There isn't much of that nonsense left now, but Miss Mitty has got it and Theophilus has got it; and, when all's said, they might have something considerably worse. Why, look at Miss Matoaca. When I first saw her you'd never have imagined there was an idea inside her head."

"I can understand that she must have been very pretty."

"Pretty? She was as beautiful as an angel. And to think of her distributing those damned woman's rights pamphlets! She left one on my desk," he added, sticking out his lower lip like a crying child, and wiping his bloodshot eyes on the hem of his silk handkerchief. "I tell you if she'd had a husband this would never have happened."

"We can't tell — it might have been worse, if she believes it."

"Believes what, sir?" gasped the great man, enraged. "Believes that outlandish Yankee twaddle about a woman wanting any rights except the right to a husband! Do you think she'd be running round loose in this crackbrained way if she had a home she could stay in and a husband she could slave over? I tell you there's not a woman alive that ain't happier with a bad husband than with none at all."

"That's a comfortable view, at any rate."

"View? It's not a view, it's a fact — and what business has a lady got with a view anyway? If Miss Matoaca hadn't got hold of those heathenish views, she'd be a happy wife and mother this very minute."

"Does it follow, General, that she would have been a happy one?" I asked a little unfairly.

"Of course it follows. Isn't every wife and mother happy? What more does she want unless she's a Yankee Abolitionist?"

"Who's a Yankee?" enquired young George, in his amiable voice from the hall. "I'm surprised to hear you calling names when the war is over, sir."

"I wasn't calling names, George. I was just saying that Miss Matoaca Bland was a Yankee. Did you ever hear of a Virginia lady who wasn't content to be what the Lord and the men intended her?"

"No, sir, I never did — but it seems to me that Miss Matoaca has managed to secure a greater share of your attention than the more amenable Virginia ladies."

"Well, isn't it a sad enough sight to see any lady going cracked?" retorted the General, hotly; "do you

know, George, that Sally Mickleborough — he says he's sure it's Sally Mickleborough — has promised to marry Ben Starr?"

"Oh, it's Sally all right," responded George, "she has just told me."

He came over and held out his hand, smiling pleasantly, though there was a hurt look in his eyes.

"I congratulate you, Ben," he observed in his easy, good-natured way, "the best man comes in ahead."

His face wore the frown, not from temper, but from pain, that I had seen on it at the club when his favourite hunter had dropped dead, and he had tried to appear indifferent. He was a superb horseman, a typical man about town, a bit of a sport, also, as Dr. Theophilus said. I knew he loved Sally, just as I had known he loved his hunter, by a sympathetic reading of his character rather than by any expression of regret on his long, highly coloured, slightly wooden countenance, with its set mouth over which drooped a mustache so carefully trimmed that it looked almost as if it were glued on his upper lip.

"By the way, uncle, have you heard the last news?" he asked, "Barclay is buying all the A. P. & C. Stock he can lay hands on. It's selling at —"

"Hello! What's that? Barclay, did you say? I knew it was coming, and that he'd spring it. Here, Hatty, give me my cape, I'm going back to the office!"

"George, George, the doctor told you not to excite yourself," remonstrated Miss Hatty, appearing in the doorway with a glass of medicine in her hand.

"Excite myself? Pish! Tush!" retorted the General, "I ain't a bit more excited than you are yourself

Do you think if I hadn't had a cool head they'd have made me president of the South Midland? But I tell you Barclay's trying to get control of the A. P. & C., and I'll be blamed if he shall! Do you want him to snatch a railroad out of my very mouth, madam?"

By this time he had got into his cape and slouch hat, turning at the last moment to swallow Miss Hatty's dose of medicine with a wry mouth. Then with one arm in George's and one in mine, he descended the steps and limped as far as the car line on Main Street.

On that same afternoon I walked out to meet Sally on her ride in one of the country roads to what was called "the Pump House," and when she had dismounted, we strolled together along the little path under the scarlet buds of young maples. At the end of the path there was a rude bench placed beside the stream, which broke from the dam above with a sound that was like laughing water. The grass was powdered with small spring flowers, and overhead a sycamore drooped its silvery branches to the sparkling waves. Spring was in the air, in the scarlet buds of maples, in the song of birds, in the warm wind that played on Sally's flushed cheek and lifted a loosened curl on her forehead. And spring was in my heart, too, as I sat there beside her, on the old bench, with her hand in mine.

"You will marry me in November, Sally?"

"On the nineteenth of November, as I promised. Aunt Mitty and Aunt Matoaca have forbidden me to mention your name to them, so I shall walk with you to church some morning — to old Saint John's, I think, Ben."

"Then may God punish me if I ever fail you," I answered.

Her look softened. "You will never fail me."

"You will trust me now and in all the future?"

"Now and in all the future."

As we strolled back a little later to her horse that was tethered to a maple on the roadside, I told her of the success of the National Oil Company and of the possibility that I might some day be a rich man.

"As things go in the South, sweetheart, I'm a rich man now for my years."

"I am glad for your sake, Ben, but I have never expected to have wealth, you know."

"All the same I want you to have it, I want to give it to you."

"Then I'll begin to love it for your sake — if it means that to you?"

"It means nothing else. But what do you think it will mean to your aunts next November?"

She shook her head, while I untethered Dolly, the sorrel mare.

"They haven't a particle of worldliness, either of them, and I don't believe it will make any great difference if we have millions. Of course if you were, for instance, the president of the South Midland they would not have refused to receive you, but they would have objected quite as strongly to your marrying into the family. What you are yourself might concern them if they were inviting you to dinner, but when it is a question of connecting yourself with their blood, it is what your father was that affects them. I really believe," she finished half angrily, half humorously,

"that Aunt Mitty — not Aunt Matoaca — would honestly rather I'd marry a well-born drunkard or libertine than you, whom she calls 'quite an extraordinary-looking young man.'"

"Then if they can neither be cajoled nor bought, I see no hope for them," I replied, laughing, as she sprang from my hand into her saddle.

The red flame of the maple was in her face as she looked back at me. "Everything will come right, Ben, if we only love enough," she said.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PRINCIPLES OF MISS MATOACA

When I walked down to the office now, I began to be pointed out as "the General's wonderful boy." Invitations to start companies, or to directorships of innumerable boards, were showered upon me, and adventurous promoters of vain schemes sought desperately to shelter themselves behind my growing credit. Then, in the following October, the consolidated oil interests bought out my business at my own price, and I awoke one glorious morning to the knowledge that my fortune was made.

"If you're going to swell, Ben, now's the time," said the General, "and out you go."

But my training had been in a hard school, and by the end of the month he had ceased to enquire in the mornings "if my hat still fitted my head."

"You'll have your ups and downs, Ben, like the rest of us," he said, "but the main thing is, let your fortunes see-saw as they may, always keep your eyes on a level. By the way, I saw Sally Mickleborough last night, and when I asked her why she fell in love with you, she replied it was because she saw you pushing a wheel up a hill. Now there's a woman with a reason — you'd better look sharp, or she'll begin talking politics presently like her Aunt Matoaca. What do you think I found on my desk this morning? A pamphlet,

addressed in her handwriting, about the presidential election." Then his tone softened. "So Sally's going to marry you in spite of her aunts? Well, she's a good girl, a brave girl, and I'm proud of her."

When I went home to supper, I was to have a different opinion from Dr. Theophilus.

"I saw Sally Mickleborough to-day, Ben, when I called on Miss Matoaca, — [that poor lady gets flightier every day, she left a pamphlet here this morning about the presidential election] — and the girl told me in the few minutes I saw her in the hall, that she meant to marry you next month."

"She will do me that great honour, doctor."

"Well, I regret it, Ben; I can't conceal from you that I regret it. You're a good boy, and I'm proud of you, but I don't like to see young folks putting themselves in opposition to the judgment of their elders. I'm an orthodox believer in the claims of blood, you know."

"And is there nothing to be said for the claims of love?"

"The claims of moonshine, Ben," observed Mrs. Clay in her sharp voice, looking up from a pair of yarn socks she was knitting for the doctor; "you know I'm fond of you, but when you begin to talk of the claims of love driving a girl to break with her family, I feel like boxing your ears."

"You see, Tina is a cynic," remarked Dr. Theophilus, smiling, "and I don't doubt that she has her excellent reasons, as usual; most cynics have. A woman, however, has got to believe in love to the point of lunacy or become a scoffer. What I contend, now, is that love isn't moonshine, but that however solid a thing

it may be, it isn't, after all, as solid as one's duty to one's family."

"Of course I can't argue with you, doctor. I know little of the unit you call 'the family'; but I should think the first duty of the family would be to consider the happiness of the individual."

"And do you think, Ben, that you are the only person who is considering Sally's happiness?"

"I know that I am considering it; for the rest I can't speak."

"I firmly believe," broke in Mrs. Clay, "that Sally's behaviour has helped to drive Matoaca Bland clean out of her wits. She's actually sent me one of her leaflets, — what do you think of that, Theophilus? — to me, the most refined and retiring woman on earth."

"What I'd say, Tina, is that you aren't half as refined and retiring as Miss Matoaca," chuckled the doctor.

"That is merely the way she dresses," rejoined Mrs. Clay stiffly; "it is her poke bonnet and black silk mantle that deceives you. As for me, I can call no woman truly refined who does not naturally avoid the society of men."

"Well, Tina, I had a notion that all of you were pretty fond of it, when it comes to that."

"Not of the society of men, Theophilus, but of the select attentions of gentlemen."

"I'm not taking up for Miss Matoaca," pursued the good man; "I can't conscientiously do that, and I'm more concerned at this minute about the marriage of Ben and Sally. You may smile at me as superstitious, if you please, but I never yet saw a marriage turn out happily that was made in defiance of family feeling."

As I could make no reply to this, except to put forward a second time what Mrs. Clay had tartly called "the claims of moonshine," I bade the doctor good-night, and going upstairs to my room, sat down beside the small square window, which gave on the garden, with its miniature box borders and its single clipped yew-tree, over which a young moon was rising. "A mixture of a fighter and a dreamer," the old man had once called me, and it seemed to me now that something apart from the mere business of living and the alert man of affairs, brooded in me over the young moon and the yew-tree.

A letter from Sally had reached me a few hours before, and taking it from my pocket, I turned to the lamp and read it for the sixth time with a throbbing heart.

"You ask me if I am happy, dearest," she wrote, "and I answer that I am happy, with a still, deep happiness, over which a hundred troubles and cares ripple like shadows on a lake. But oh! poor Aunt Mitty, with her silent hurt pride in her face, and poor Aunt Matoaca, with the strained, unnatural brightness in her eyes, and her cheeks so like rose leaves that have crumpled. Oh, Ben, I believe Aunt Matoaca is living over again her own romance, and it breaks my heart. Last night I went into her room, and found her with her old yellowed wedding veil and orange blossoms laid out on the bed. She tried to pretend that she was straightening her cedar chests, but she looked so little and pitiable — if you could only have seen her! I wonder what she would be now if the General had been a man like you? How grateful I am, how profoundly

thankful with my whole heart that I am marrying a man that I can trust!"

"That I can trust!" Her words rang in my ears, and I heard them again, clear and strong, the next morning, when I met Miss Matoaca as I was on my way to my office. She was coming slowly up Franklin Street, her arms filled with packages, and when she recognised me, with a shy, startled movement to turn aside, a number of leaflets fluttered from her grasp to the pavement between us. When I stooped and gathered them up, her face, under the old-fashioned poke bonnet, was brought close to my eyes, and I saw that she looked wan and pinched, and that her bright brown eyes were shining as if from fever.

"Mr. Starr," she said, straightening her thin little figure as I handed her the leaflets, "I've wanted for some time to speak a word to you on the subject of my niece — Miss Mickleborough."

"Yes, Miss Matoaca."

"My sister Mitty thought it better that I should refrain from doing so, and upon such matters she has excellent judgment. It is my habit, indeed, to yield to her opinion in everything except a question of conscience."

"Yes?" for again she had paused. "It is very kind of you," I added.

"I do not mean it for kindness, Mr. Starr. My niece is very dear to me; and since poor Sarah's unfortunate experience, we have felt more strongly, if possible, about unequal marriages. I know that you are a most remarkable young man, but I do not feel that you are in any way suited to make the happiness of our niece — Miss Mickleborough —"

"I am sorry, Miss Matoaca, but Miss Mickleborough thinks differently."

"Young people are rarely the best judges in such matters, Mr. Starr."

"But do you think their elders can judge for them?"

"If they have had experience — yes."

"Ah, Miss Matoaca, does our own experience ever teach us to understand the experience of others?"

"The Blands have never needed to be taught," she returned with pride, "that the claims of the family are not to be sacrificed to — to a sentiment. Except in the case of poor Sarah there has never been a mésalliance in our history. We have always put one thing above the consideration of our blood, and that is — a principle. If it were a question of conscience, however painful it might be to me, I should uphold my niece in her opposition to my sister Mitty. I myself have opposed her for a matter of principle."

"I am aware of it, Miss Matoaca."

Her withered cheeks were tinged with a delicate rose, and I could almost see the working of her long, narrow mind behind her long, narrow face.

"I should like to leave a few of these leaflets with you, Mr. Starr," she said.

A minute afterwards, when she had moved on with her meek, slow walk, I was left standing on the pavement with her suffrage pamphlets fluttering in my hand. Stuffing them hurriedly into my pocket, I went on to the office, utterly oblivious of the existence of any principle on earth except the one underlying the immediate expansion of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad.

A fortnight later I heard that Miss Matoaca had begun writing letters to the "Richmond Herald"; and I remembered, with an easy masculine complacency, the pamphlets I had thrown into the waste basket beside the General's desk. The presidential election, with its usual upheaval of the business world, had arrived; and that timid little Miss Matoaca should have intruded herself into the affairs of the nation did not occur to me as possible, until the General informed me, while we watched a Democratic procession one afternoon, that Miss Mitty had come to him the day before in tears over the impropriety of her sister's conduct.

"She begged me to remonstrate with Miss Matoaca," he pursued, "and by George, I promised her that I would. There's one thing, Ben, I've never been able to stand, and that's the sight of a woman in tears. Of course when you've made 'em cry yourself, it is different; but to have a lady coming to you weeping over somebody else — and a lady like Miss Mitty — well, I honestly believe if she'd requested me to give her my skin, I'd have tried to get out of it just to oblige her."

"Did you go to Miss Matoaca?" I asked, for the picture of the General lecturing his old love on the subject of the proprieties had caught my attention even in the midst of a large Democratic procession that was marching along the street. While he rambled on in his breaking voice, which had begun to grow weak and old, I gazed over his head at the political banners with their familiar, jesting inscriptions.

"I declare, Ben, I'd rather have swallowed a dose of medicine," he went on; "you see I used to know Miss

Matoaca very well forty years ago — I reckon you've heard of it. We were engaged to be married, and it was broken off because of some woman's rights nonsense she'd got in her head."

"Well, it's hard to imagine your interview of yesterday."

"There wasn't any interview. I went to her and put it as mildly as I could. 'Miss Matoaca,' I said, 'I'm sorry to hear you've gone cracked.'"

"And how did she take it?"

"'Do you mean my heart or my head, General?' she asked — she had always plenty of spirit, had Matoaca, for all her soft looks. 'It's your head,' I answered. 'Lord knows I'm not casting any reflections on the rest of you.' 'Then it has fared better than my heart, General,' she replied, 'for that was broken.' She looked kind of wild, Ben, as she said it. I don't know what she was talking about, I declare on my honour I don't!"

A cheer went up from the procession, and an expression of eager curiosity came into his face.

"Can you read that inscription, Ben? My eyes ain't so good as they used to be."

"It's some campaign joke. So your lecture wasn't quite a success?"

"It would have been if she'd listened to reason."

"But she did not, I presume?"

"She never listened to it in her life. If she had, she wouldn't be a poor miserable old maid at this moment. What's that coming they're making such a noise about? My God, Ben, if it ain't Matoaca herself!"

It was Matoaca, and the breathless horror in the

General's voice passed into my own mind as I looked. There she was, in her poke bonnet and her black silk mantle, walking primly at the straggling end of the procession, among a crowd of hooting small boys and gaping negroes. Her eyes, very wide and bright, like the eyes of one who is mentally deranged, were fixed straight ahead, over the lines of men marching in front of her, on the blue sky above the church steeples. Under her poke bonnet I saw her meekly parted hair and her faded cheeks, flushed now with a hectic colour. In one neatly gloved hand her silk skirt was held primly; in the other she carried a little white silk flag, on which the staring gold letters were lost in the rippling folds. With her eyes on the sky and her feet in the dust, she marched, a prim, ladylike figure, an inspired spinster, oblivious alike of the hooting small boys and the half-compassionate, half-scoffing gazers upon the pavement.

"She's crazy, Ben," said the General, and his voice broke with a sob.

For a minute, as dazed as he, I stared blankly at the little figure with the white flag. Then bewilderment gave place before the call to action, and it seemed to me that I saw Sally there in Miss Matoaca, as I had seen her in the rising moon over the clipped yew, and in the whirlpool of the stock market. Leaving my place at the General's side, I descended the steps at a bound, and made my way through the jostling, noisy crowd to the little lady in its midst.

"Miss Matoaca!" I said.

For the first time her eyes left the sky, and as she looked down, the consciousness of her situation entered

into her strained bright eyes. Her composure was lost in a birdlike, palpitating movement of terror.

"I — I am going as far as the Square, Mr. Starr," she replied, as if she were repeating by rote a phrase in a strange tongue.

At my approach the ridicule, somewhat subdued by the sense of her helplessness, broke suddenly loose. Bending over I offered her my arm, my head still uncovered. As the hand holding the white flag drooped from exhaustion, I took it, with the banner, into my own.

"Then I'll go with you, Miss Matoaca," I responded.

We started on, took a few measured paces in the line of march, and then her strength failing her, she sank back, with a pathetic moan of weariness, into my arms. Lifting her like a child I carried her out of the street and up the steps into the General's office. Turning at a touch as I entered the room, I saw that Sally was at my side.

"I've sent for Dr. Theophilus," she said. "There, put her on the lounge."

Kneeling on the floor she began bathing Miss Matoaca's forehead with water which somebody had brought. The General, his eyes very red and bloodshot and his lower lip fallen into a senile droop, was trying vainly to fan her with his pocket-handkerchief.

"We have always feared this would happen," said Sally, very quiet and pale.

"She was talking to me yesterday about her heart," returned the General, "and I didn't know what she meant."

He bent over, fanning her more violently with his

silk handkerchief, and on the lounge beneath, Miss Matoaca lay, very prim and maidenly, with her skirt folded modestly about her ankles.

Dr. Theophilus, coming in with the messenger, bent over her for a long minute.

"I always thought her sense of honour would kill her," he said at last as he looked up.

CHAPTER XIX

SHOWS THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

A WEEK after Miss Matoaca's funeral, Sally met me in one of the secluded streets by the Capitol Square, and we walked slowly up and down for an hour in the November sunshine. In her black clothes she appeared to have bloomed into a brighter beauty, a richer colour.

"Why can't I believe, Sally, that you will really marry me a week from to-day?"

"A week from to-day. Just you and I in old Saint John's."

"And Miss Mitty, will she not come with you?"

"She refuses to let me speak your name to her. It would be hard to leave her, Ben, if — if she hadn't been so bitter and stern to me for the last year. I live in the same house with her and see nothing of her."

"I thought Miss Matoaca's death might have softened her."

"Nothing will soften her. Aunt Matoaca's death has hurt her terribly, I know, but — and this is a dreadful thing to say — I believe it has hurt her pride more than her heart. If the poor dear had died quietly in her bed, with her prayer-book on the counterpane, Aunt Mitty would have grieved for her in an entirely different way. She lives in a kind of stained-glass seclusion, and anything outside of that seems to her vulgar — even emotion."

"How I must have startled her."

"You startled her so that she has never had courage to face the effect. Think what it must mean to a person who has lived sixty-five years in an atmosphere of stained glass to be dragged outside and made to look at the great common sun —"

A squirrel, running out from between the iron railing surrounding the square, crossed the pavement and then sat erect in front of us, his bushy tail waving like a brush over his ears. While she was bending over to speak to it, the Bland surrey turned the corner at a rapid pace, and I saw the figure of Miss Mitty, swathed heavily in black, sitting very stiff and upright behind old Shadrach. As she caught sight of us, she leaned slightly forward, and in obedience to her order, the carriage stopped the next instant beside the pavement.

"Sally!" she called, and there was no hint in her manner that she was aware of my presence.

"Yes, Aunt Mitty." The girl had straightened herself, and stood calmly and without embarrassment at my side.

"I should like you to come with me to Hollywood."

"Yes, Aunt Mitty."

Pausing for an instant, she gave me her hand. "Until Wednesday, Ben," she said in a low, clear voice, and then entering the surrey, she took her place under the fur robe and was driven away.

The week dragged by like a century, and on Wednesday morning, when I got up and opened my shutters, I found that our wedding-day had begun in a slow autumnal rain. A thick tent of clouds stretched over-

head, and the miniature box in the garden looked like flutings of crape on the pebbled walk, which had been washed clean and glistening during the night. The clipped yew stood dark and sombre as a solitary mourner among the blossomless rose-bushes.

At breakfast Mrs. Clay poured my coffee with a rigid hand and an averted face, and Dr. Theophilus appeared to find difficulty in keeping up his cheerful morning comments.

"I'll miss you, Ben, my boy," he remarked, as he rose from the table; "it's a sad day for me when I lose you."

"I hate to lose you, doctor, but I shan't, after all, be far off. I've bought a house, as you know, beyond the Park in Franklin Street."

"The one Jack Montgomery used to live in before he lost his money — yes, it is a fine place. Well, you have my best wishes, Ben, whatever comes; you may be sure of that. I hope you and Sally will have every happiness."

He shook my hand in his hearty grasp before going into his little office, and the next minute I went out into the rain, and walked down for a few words with the General, before I met Sally under the big sycamore at the side gate. I had waited for her but a little while when she came out under an umbrella held by Aunt Euphronasia, who was to accompany us on our journey South in the General's private car. As she entered the carriage, I saw that she wore a white dress under her long black cloak.

"Mammy wouldn't let me be married in black," she said; "she says it means death or a bad husband."

"Dar ain' gwine be a bad husband fur dish yer chile,"

grumbled the old woman, who was evidently full of gloomy forebodings, "caze she ain' built wid de kinder spine, suh, dat bends easy."

"There'll be nobody at church?" asked Sally.

"Only the General, and I suppose the sexton."

"I am glad." She leaned forward, we clasped hands, and I saw that the eyes she lifted to mine were starry and expectant, as they had been that day, so many years ago, when she stood between the gate and the bed of geraniums in the General's yard.

The carriage rolled softly over the soaking streets, and above the sound of the wheels I heard the patter of the rain on the dead leaves in the gutters. I can see still a wet sparrow or two that fluttered down from the bared branches, and the negro maid sweeping the water from the steps in front of the doctor's house. There was no wind, and the rain fell in straight elongated drops like a shower of silvery pine-needles. The mixture of a fighter and a dreamer! On my wedding-day, as I sat beside the woman I loved, approaching the fulfilment of my desire, I was conscious of a curious gravity, of almost a feeling of sadness. The stillness without, intensified by the slow, soft fall of the rain on the dead leaves, seemed not detached, but at one with the inner stillness which possessed alike my heart and my brain. I, the man of action, the embodiment of worldly success, was awed by the very intensity of my love, which added a throb of apprehension to the supreme moment of its fulfilment.

The carriage crawled up the long hill, and stopped before the steps leading to the churchyard of Saint John's. Like a sombre omen up went the umbrella in

the hands of Aunt Euphronasia; and as I led Sally across the pavement to the General, who stood waiting under the dripping maples and sycamores, I saw that she was very pale, and that her lips trembled when she smiled back at me. With her arm in the General's, she passed before me up the walk to the church door, while Aunt Euphronasia and I followed under the same umbrella a short way behind.

At the door the minister met us with outstretched hands, for he had known us from childhood; and when Aunt Euphronasia had removed the bride's moist cloak, Sally joined me before the altar, in the square of faint light that fell from the windows. The interior of the church was very dim, so dim that her white dress and the minister's gown seemed the only patches of high light in the obscurity. Through the window I could see the wet silvery boughs of a sycamore, and, I remember still, as if it had been illuminated upon my brain, a single bronzed leaf that writhed and twisted at the end of a slender branch. Never in my life had my mind been so awake to trivial impressions, so acutely aware of the external world, so perfectly unable to realise the profound significance of the words I uttered. The sound of the soft rain on the graves outside was in my ears, and instead of my marriage, I found myself thinking of the day I had seen Sally dancing toward me in her red shoes, over the coloured leaves. In those few minutes, which changed the course of our two lives, it was as if I myself — the man that men knew — had been present only in a dream.

When it was over, the General kissed Sally, and wiped his eyes on his silk handkerchief.

"You're a brave girl, my dear, and I'm proud of you," he said; "you've got your mother's heart and your father's fighting blood, and that's a good blending."

"I wish the sun had shone on you," observed the old minister, while I helped her into her cloak; "but we Christians can't afford to waste regret on heathen superstitions. I married your mother," he added, as if there were possible comfort in a proof of the futility of omens, "on a cloudless morning in June."

Sally shivered, and glanced across the churchyard, where the water dripped from the bared trees on the graves that were covered thickly with sodden leaves.

"The sun may welcome us home," she replied, with an effort to be cheerful; "we shall be back again in a fortnight."

"And you go South?" asked the minister nervously, like a man who tries to make conversation because his professional duty requires it of him. Then the umbrella went up again, and after a good-by to the General, we started together down the walk, with Aunt Euphronasia following close as a shadow.

"The rain does not sadden you, sweetheart?"

"It saddens me, but that does not mean that I am not happy."

"And you would do it over again?"

"I would do it over until — until the last hour of my life."

"Oh, Sally, Sally, if I were only sure that I was worthy."

A light broke in her face, and as she looked up at me, I bent over and kissed her under the leafless trees.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH SOCIETY RECEIVES US

It was a bright December evening when we returned to Richmond, and drove through the frosty air to our new home. The house was large and modern, with a hideous brown stone front, and at the top of the brown stone steps several girl friends of Sally's were waiting to receive us. Beyond them, in the brilliantly lighted hall, I saw masses of palms and roses under the oak staircase.

"Oh, you bad Sally, not even to ask us to your wedding. And you know how we adore one!" cried a handsome, dark girl in a riding habit, named Bonny Page. "How do you do, Mr. Starr? We're to call you 'Ben' now because you've married our cousin."

I made some brief response, and while I spoke, I felt again the old sense of embarrassment, of strangeness in my surroundings, that always came upon me in a gathering of women — especially of girls. With Sally I never forgot that I was a strong man, — with Bonny Page I remembered only that I was a plain one. As she stood there, with her arm about Sally, and her black eyes dancing with fun, she looked the incarnate spirit of mischief, — and beside the spirit of mischief I felt decidedly heavy. She was a tall, splendid girl, with a beautiful figure, — the belle of Richmond and the best

horsewoman of the state. I had seen her take a jump that had brought my heart to my throat, and come down on the other side with a laugh. A little dazzling, a little cold, fine, quick, generous to her friends, and merciless to her lovers, I had wondered often what subtle sympathy had knit Sally and herself so closely together.

"You'd always promised that I should be your bridesmaid," she remarked reproachfully; "she's hurt us dreadfully, hasn't she, Bessy? And it's very forgiving of us to warm her house and have her dinner ready for her."

Bessy, the little heroine of the azalea wreath and my first party, murmured shyly that she hoped the furniture was placed right and that the dinner would be good.

"Oh, you darlings, it's too sweet of you!" said Sally, entering the drawing-room, amid palms and roses, with an arm about the neck of each. "You know, don't you," she went on, "that poor Aunt Mitty's not coming kept me from having even you? How is she, Bonny? O Bonny, she won't speak to me."

Immediately she was clasped in Bonny's arms, where she shed a few tears on Bonny's handsome shoulder.

"She'll grow used to it," said little Bessy; "but, Sally, how did you have the courage?"

"Ask Bonny how she had the courage to take that five-foot jump."

"I took it with my teeth set and my eyes shut," said Bonny.

"Well, that's how I took Ben, with my teeth set and my eyes shut tight."

"And I came down with a laugh," added Bonny.

"So did I — I came down with a laugh. Oh, you dears, how lovely the house looks! Here are all the bridal roses that I missed and you've remembered."

"There're blue roses in your room," said Bonny; "I mean on the chintz and on the paper."

"How can I help being happy, when I have blue roses, Bonny? Aren't blue roses an emblem of the impossible achieved?"

Bonny's dancing black eyes were on me, and I read in them plainly the thought, "Yes, I'm going to be nice to you because Sally has married you, and Sally's my cousin — even if I can't understand how she came to do it."

No, she couldn't understand, and she never would, this I read also. The man that she saw and the man that Sally knew were two different persons, drawing life from two different sources of sympathy. To her I was still, and would always be, the "magnificent animal," — a creature of good muscle and sinew, with an honest eye, doubtless, and clean hands, but lacking in the finer qualities of person and manner that must appeal to her taste. Where Sally beheld power, and admired, Bonny Page saw only roughness, and wondered.

Presently, they led her away, and I heard their merry voices floating down from the bedrooms above. The pink light of the candles on the dinner table in the room beyond, the vague, sweet scent of the roses, and the warmth of the wood fire burning on the andirons, seemed to grow faint and distant, for I was very tired with the fatigue of a man whose muscles are cramped

from want of exercise. I felt all at once that I had stepped from the open world into a place that was too small for me. I was a rich man at last, I was the husband, too, of the princess of the enchanted garden, and yet in the midst of the perfume and the soft lights and the laughter floating down from above, I saw myself, by some freak of memory, as I had crouched homeless in the straw under a deserted stall in the Old Market. Would the thought of the boy I had been haunt forever the man I had become? Did my past add a keener happiness to my present, or hang always like a threatening shadow above it? There was a part in my life which these girls could not understand, which even Sally, whom I loved, could never share with me. How could they or she comprehend hunger, who had never gone without for a moment? Or sympathise with the lust of battle when they had never encountered an obstacle? Already I heard the call of the streets, and my blood responded to it in the midst of the scented atmosphere. These things were for Sally, but for me was the joy of the struggle, the passion to achieve that I might return with my spoils and pile them higher and higher before her feet. The grasping was what I loved, not the possession; the instant of triumph, not the fruits of the conquest. Love throbbed in my heart, but my mind, as if freeing itself from a restraint, followed the Great South Midland and Atlantic, covering that night under the stars nearly twenty thousand miles of road. The elemental man in me chafed under the social curb, and I longed at that instant to bear the woman I had won out into the rough joys of the world. My muscles would soon grow flabby in this scented warmth. The

fighter would war with the dreamer, and I would regret the short, fierce battle with my competitors in the business of life.

A slight sound made me turn, and I saw Bonny Page standing alone in the doorway, and looking straight at me with her dancing eyes.

"I don't know you yet, Ben," she said in the direct, gallant manner of a perfect horsewoman, "but I'm going to like you."

"Please try," I answered, "and I'll do my best not to make it hard."

"I don't think it will be hard, but even if it were, I'd do it for Sally's sake. Sally is my darling."

"And mine. So we're alike in one thing at least."

"I'm perfectly furious with Aunt Mitty. I mean to tell her so the next time I've taken a high jump."

"Poor Miss Mitty. How can she help herself? She was born that way."

"Well, it was a very bad way to be born — to want to break Sally's heart. Do you know, I think it was delightful — the way you did it. If I'm ever married, I want to run away, too, — only I'll run away on horseback, because that will be far more exciting."

She ran on merrily, partly I knew to take my measure while she watched me, partly to ease the embarrassment which her exquisite social instinct had at once discerned. She was charming, friendly, almost affectionate, yet I was conscious all the time that, in spite of herself, she was a little critical, a trifle aloof. Her perfect grooming, the very fineness of her self-possession, her high-bred gallantry of manner, and even the shining gloss on her black, beribboned hair, and

her high boots, produced in me a sense of remoteness, which I found it impossible altogether to overcome.

In a little while there was a flutter on the staircase, and the other girls trooped down, with Sally in their midst. She had changed her travelling dress for a gown of white, cut low at the neck, and about her throat she wore a necklace of pearls I had given her at her wedding. There was a bright flush in her face, and she looked to me as she had done that day, in her red shoes, in Saint John's churchyard.

When I came downstairs from my dressing-room, I found that the girls had gone, and she was standing by the dinner table, with her face bent down over the vase of pink roses in the centre.

"So we are in our own home, darling, at last," I said, and a few minutes later, as I looked across the pink candle shades and the roses, and saw her sitting opposite to me, I told myself that at last both the fighter in me and the dreamer had found the fulfilment of their desire.

After dinner, when I had had my smoke in the library, we caught hands and wandered like two children over the new house — into the pink and white guest room, and then into Sally's bedroom, where the blue roses sprawled over the chintz-covered furniture and the silk curtains. A glass door gave on a tiny balcony, and throwing a shawl about her head and her bare shoulders, she went with me out into the frosty December night, where a cold bright moon was riding high above the church steeples. With my arm about her, and her head on my breast, we stood in silence gazing over the city, while the sense of her nearness,

of her throbbing spirit and body, filled my heart with an exquisite peace.

"You and I are the world, Ben."

"You are my world, anyway."

"It is such a happy world to-night. There is nothing but love in it — no pain, no sorrow, no disappointment. Why doesn't everybody love, I wonder?"

"Everybody hasn't you."

"I'm so sorry for poor Aunt Mitty, — she never loved, — and for poor Aunt Matoaca, because she didn't love my lover. Oh, you are so strong, Ben; that, I think, is why I first loved you! I see you always in the background of my thoughts pushing that wheel up the hill."

"That won you. And to think if I'd known you were there, Sally, I couldn't have done it."

"That, too, is why I love you, so there's another reason! It isn't only your strength, Ben, it is, I believe, still more your self-forgetfulness. Then you forgot yourself because you thought of the poor horse; and again, do you remember the day of Aunt Matoaca's death, when you gave her your arm and took her little flag in your hand? You would have marched all the way to the Capitol just like that, and I don't believe you would ever have known that it looked ridiculous or that people were laughing at you."

"To tell the truth, Sally, I should never have cared."

She clung closer, her perfumed hair on my breast.

"And yet they wondered why I loved you," she murmured; "they wondered why!"

"Can you guess why I loved you?" I asked. "Was it for your red shoes? Or for that tiny scar like a dimple I've always adored?"

"I never told you what made that," she said, after a moment. "I was a very little baby when my father got angry with mamma one day — he had been drinking — and he upset the cradle in which I was asleep."

She lifted her face, and I kissed the scar under the white shawl.

The next day when I came home to luncheon, she told me that she had been to her old home to see Miss Mitty.

"I couldn't stand the thought of her loneliness, so I went into the drawing-room at the hour I knew she would be tending her sweet alyssum and Dicky, the canary. She was there, looking very thin and old, and, Ben, she treated me like a stranger. She wouldn't kiss me, and she didn't ask me a single question — only spoke of the weather and her flower boxes, as if I had called for the first time."

"I know, I know," I said, taking her into my arms.

"And everybody else is so kind. People have been sending me flowers all day. Did you ever see such a profusion? They are all calling, too, — the Fitzhughs, the Harrisons, the Tuckers, the Mayos, Jennie Randolph came, and old Mrs. Tucker, who never goes anywhere since her daughter died, and Charlotte Peyton, and all the Corbins in a bunch." Then her tone changed. "Ben," she said, "I want to see that little sister of yours. Will you take me there this afternoon?"

Something in her request, or in the way she uttered it, touched me to the heart.

"I'd like you to see Jessy — she's pretty enough to look at — but I didn't mean you to marry my family, you know."

"I know you didn't, dear, but I've married every-

thing of yours all the same. If you can spare a few minutes after luncheon, we'll drive down and speak to her."

I could spare the few minutes, and when the carriage was ready, she came down in her hat and furs, and we went at a merry pace down Franklin Street to the boarding-house in which Jessy was living. As we drove up to the pavement, the door of the house opened and my little sister came out, dressed for walking and looking unusually pretty.

"Why, Ben, she's a beauty!" said Sally, in a whisper, as the girl approached us. To me Jessy's face had always appeared too cold and vacant for beauty, in spite of her perfect features and the brilliant fairness of her complexion. Even now I missed the glow of feeling or of animation in her glance, as she crossed the pavement with her slow, precise walk, and put her hand into Sally's.

"How do you do? It is very kind of you to come," she said in a measured, correct voice.

"Of course I came, Jessy. I am your new sister, and you must come and stay with me when I am out of mourning."

"Thank you," responded Jessy gravely, "I should like to."

The cold had touched her cheek until it looked like tinted marble, and under her big black hat her blond hair rolled in natural waves from her forehead.

"Are you happy here, Jessy?" I asked.

"They are very kind to me. There's an old gentleman boarding here now from the West. He is going to give us a theatre party to-night. They say he has

millions." For the first time the glow of enthusiasm shone in her limpid blue eyes.

"A good use to make of his millions," I laughed. "Do you hear often from President, Jessy?"

The glow faded from her eyes and they grew cold again. "He writes such bad letters," she answered, "I can hardly read them."

"Never forget," I answered sternly, "that he denied himself an education in order that you might become what you are."

While I spoke the door of the house opened again, and the old gentleman she had alluded to came gingerly down the steps. He had a small, wizened face, and he wore a fur-lined overcoat, in which it was evident that he still suffered from the cold.

"This is my brother and my sister, Mr. Cottrel," said Jessy, as he came slowly toward us.

He bowed with a pompous manner, and stood twirling the chain of his eye-glasses. "Yes, yes, I have heard of your brother. His name is well known already," he answered. "I congratulate, sir," he added, "not the 'man who got rich quickly,' as I've heard you called, but the fortunate brother of a beautiful sister."

"What a perfectly horrid old man," remarked Sally, some minutes later, as we drove back again. "I think, Ben, we'll have to take the little sister. She's a beauty."

"If she wasn't so everlastingly cold and quiet."

"It suits her style — that little precise way she has. There's a look about her like one of Perugino's saints."

Then the carriage stopped at the office, and I returned, with a high heart, to the game.

CHAPTER XXI

I AM THE WONDER OF THE HOUR

DURING the first year of my marriage I was already spoken of as the most successful speculator in the state. The whirlpool of finance had won me from the road, and I had sacrificed the single allegiance to the bolder moves of the game. Yet if I could be bold, I was cautious, too, — and that peculiar quality which the General called "financial genius," and the world named "the luck of the speculator," had enabled me to act always between the two dangerous extremes of timidity and rashness. "To get up when others sat down, and to sit down when others got up," I told the General one day, had been the rule by which I had played.

"They were talking of you at the club last night, Ben," he said. "You were the only one of us who had sense enough to load up with A. P. & C. stock when it was selling at 80, and now it's jumped up to 150. Jim Randolph was fool enough to remark that you'd had the easiest success of any man he knew."

"Easy? Does he think so?"

"'So you call that easy, gentlemen?' I responded. 'Well, I tell you that boy has sweated for it since he was seven years old. It's the only way, too, I'm sure of it. If you want to succeed, you've got to begin by sweating.'"

"Thank you, General, but I suppose most things look easy until you've tried them."

"It doesn't look easy to me, Ben, when I've seen you at it all day and half the night since you were a boy. What I said to those fellows at the club is the Gospel truth — there's but one way to get anything in this world, and that is by sweating for it."

We were in his study, to which he was confined by an attack of the gout, and at such times he loved to ramble on in his aging, reminiscent habit.

"You know, General," I said, "that they want me to accept the presidency of the Union Bank in Jennings' place. I've been one of the directors, you see, for the last three or four years."

"You'd be the youngest bank president in the country. It's a good thing, and you'd control enough money to keep you awake at night. But remember, Ben, as my dear old coloured mammy used to say to me, 'to hatch first ain't always to crow last.'"

"Do you call it hatching or crowing to become president of the Union Bank?"

"That depends. If you're shrewd and safe, as I think you are, it may turn out to be both. It would be a good plan, though, to say to yourself every time you come up Franklin Street, 'I've toted potatoes up this hill, and not my own potatoes either.' It's good for you, sir, to remember it, damned good."

"I'm not likely to forget it — they were heavy."

"It was the best thing that ever happened to you — it was the making of you. There's nothing I know so good for a man as to be able to remember that he toted somebody else's potatoes. Now, look at that George

of mine. He never toted a potato in his life — not even his own. If he had, he might have been a bank president to-day instead of the pleasant, well-dressed club-man he is, with a mustache like wax-work. I've an idea, Ben, but don't let it get any farther, that he never got over not having Sally, and that took the spirit out of him. She's well, ain't she?"

"Yes, she's very well and more beautiful than ever."

"Hasn't developed any principles yet, eh? I always thought they were in her."

"None that interfere with my comfort at any rate."

"Keep an eye on her and keep her occupied all the time. That's the way to deal with a woman who has ideas — don't leave her a blessed minute to sit down and hatch 'em out. Pet her, dress her, amuse her, and whenever she begins to talk about a principle, step out and buy her a present to take her mind off it. Anything no bigger than a thimble will turn a woman's mind in the right direction if you spring it on her like a surprise. Ah, that's the way her Aunt Matoaca ought to have been treated. Poor Miss Matoaca, she went wrong for the want of a little simple management like that. You never saw Miss Matoaca Bland when she was a girl, Ben?"

"I have heard she was beautiful."

"Beautiful ain't the word, sir! I tell you the first time I ever saw her she came to church in a white poke bonnet lined with cherry-coloured silk, and her cheeks exactly a match to her bonnet lining." He got out his big silk handkerchief, and blew his nose loudly, after which he wiped his eyes, and sat staring moodily

at his foot bandaged out of all proportion to its natural size.

"Who'd have thought to look at her then," he pursued, "that she'd go cracked over this Yankee abolition idea before she died."

"Why, I thought they owned slaves up to the end, General."

"Slaves? What have slaves got to do with it? Ain't the abolitionists and the woman suffragists and the rest of those damned fire-eating Yankees all the same? What they want to do is to overturn the Constitution, and it makes no difference to 'em whether they overturn it under one name or the other. I tell you, Ben, as sure's my name's George Bolingbroke, Matoaca Bland couldn't have told me to the day of her death whether she was an abolitionist or a woman's suffragist. When a woman goes cracked like that, all she wants is to be a fire-eater, and I doubt if she ever knows what she is eating it about. Women ain't like men, my boy, there isn't an ounce of moderation to the whole sex, sir. Why, look at the way they're always getting their hearts broken or their heads cracked. They can't feel an emotion or think an idea that something inside of 'em doesn't begin to split. Now, did you ever hear of a man getting his heart broken or his brain cracked?"

The canker was still there, doing its bitter work. For forty years Miss Matoaca had had her revenge, and even in the grave her ghost would not lie quiet and let him rest. In his watery little eyes and his protruding, childish lip, I read the story of fruitless excesses and of vain retaliations.

When I reached home, I found Sally in her upstairs sitting-room with Jessy, who was trying on an elaborate ball gown of white lace. Since the two years of mourning were over, the little sister had come to stay with us, and Sally was filled with generous plans for the girl's pleasure. Jessy, herself, received it all with her reserved, indifferent manner, turning her beautiful profile upon us with an expression of saintly serenity. It amused me sometimes to wonder what was behind the brilliant red and white of her complexion — what thoughts? what desires? what impulses? She went so placidly on her way, gaining what she wanted, executing what she planned, accepting what was offered to her, that there were moments when I felt tempted to arouse her by a burst of anger — to discover if a single natural instinct survived the shining polish of her exterior. Sally had worked a miracle in her manner, her speech, her dress; and yet in all that time I had never seen the ripple of an impulse cross the exquisite vacancy of her face. Did she feel? Did she think? Did she care? I demanded. Once or twice I had spoken of President, trying to excite a look of gratitude, if not of affection; but even then no change had come in the mirror-like surface of her blue eyes. President, I was aware, had sacrificed himself to her while I was still a child, had slaved and toiled and denied himself that he might make her a lady. Yet when I asked her if she ever wrote to him, she smiled quietly and shook her head.

"Why don't you write to him, Jessy? He was always fond of you."

"He writes such dreadful letters — just like a work-

ing-man's — that I hate to get them," she answered, turning to catch the effect of her train in the long mirror.

"He is a working-man, Jessy, and so am I."

She accepted the statement without demur, as she accepted everything — neither denying nor disputing, but apparently indifferent to its truth or falseness. My eyes met Sally's in the glass, and they held me in a long, compassionate gaze.

"All men are working-men, Jessy, if they are worth anything," she said, "and any work is good work if it is well done."

"He is a miner," responded Jessy.

"If he is, it is because he prefers to do the work he knows to being idle," I answered sharply. "What you must remember is that when he had little, and I had nothing, he gave you freely all that he had."

She did not answer, and for a moment I thought I had convinced her.

"Will you write to President to-night?" I asked.

"But we are having a dinner party. How can I?"

"To-morrow, then?"

"I am going to the theatre with Mrs. Blansford. Mr. Cottrel has taken a box for her. He is one of the richest men in the West, isn't he?"

"There are a great many rich men in the West. How can it concern you?"

"Oh, it's beautiful to be rich," she returned, in the most enthusiastic phrase I had ever heard her utter; and gathering her white lace train over her arm she went into her bedroom to remove the dress.

"What is she made of, Sally?" I asked, in sheer desperation; "flesh and blood, do you think?"

"I don't know, Ben, not your flesh and blood, certainly."

"But for President — why wasn't my father hanged before he gave him such a name! — she would have remained ignorant and common with all her beauty. He almost starved himself in order to send her to a good school and give her pretty clothes."

"I know, I know, it seems terribly ungrateful — but perhaps she's excited over her first dinner."

That evening we were to give our first formal dinner, and when I came downstairs a little before eight o'clock, I found the rooms a bower of azaleas, over which the pink-shaded lamps shed a light that touched Jessy's lace gown with pale rose.

"It's like fairyland, isn't it?" she said, "and the table is so beautiful. Come and see the table."

She led me into the dining-room and we stood gazing down on the decorations, while we waited for Sally.

"Who is coming, Jessy?"

"Twelve in all. General Bolingbroke and Mr. Bolingbroke, Mrs. Fitzhugh, Governor Blenner, Miss Page," she went on reading the cards, "Mr. Mason, Miss Watson, Colonel Henry, Mrs. Preston, Mrs. Tyler —"

"That will do. I'll know them when I see them. Do you like it, Jessy?"

"Yes, I like it. Isn't my dress lovely?"

"Very, but don't get spoiled. You see Sally has had this all her life, and she isn't spoiled."

"I don't believe she could be," she responded, for her

admiration for Sally was the most human thing I had ever discovered about her, "and she's so beautiful — more beautiful, I think, than Bonny Page, though of course nobody would agree with me."

"Well, she's perfect, and she always was and always will be," I returned.

"You're a great man, aren't you?" she asked suddenly, turning away from the table.

"Why, no. What in the world put that into your head?"

"Well, the General told Mr. Cottrel you were a genius, and Mr. Cottrel said you were the first genius he had ever heard of who measured six feet two in his stockings."

"Of course I'm not a genius. They were joking."

"You're rich anyway, and that's just as good."

I was about to make some sharp rejoinder, irritated by her insistence on the distinction of wealth, when the sound of Sally's step fell on my ears, and a moment later she came down the brilliantly lighted staircase, her long black lace train rippling behind her. As she moved among the lamps and azaleas, I thought I had never seen her more radiant — not even on the night of her first party when she wore the white rose in her wreath of plaits. Her hair was arranged to-night in the same simple fashion, her mouth was as vivid, her grey eyes held the same mingling of light with darkness. But there was a deeper serenity in her face, brought there by the untroubled happiness of her marriage, and her figure had grown fuller and nobler, as if it had moulded itself to the larger and finer purposes of life.

"The house is charming, Jessy is lovely, and you, Ben, are magnificent," she said, her eyebrows arching merrily as she slipped her hand in my arm. "And it's a good dinner, too," she went on; "the terrapin is perfect. I sent into the country for the game, and the man from Washington came down with the decorations and the ices. Best of all, I made the salad myself, so be sure to eat it. We'll begin to be gay now, shan't we? Are you sure we have money enough for a ball?"

"We've money enough for anything that you want, Sally."

"Then I'll spend it — but oh! Ben, promise me you won't mention stocks to-night until the women have left the table."

"I'll promise you, and keep it, too. I don't believe I ever introduced a subject in my life to any woman but you."

"I'm glad, at least, there's one subject you didn't introduce to any other."

Then the door-bell rang, and we hurried into the drawing-room in time to receive Governor Blenner and the General, who arrived together.

"I almost got a fall on your pavement, Ben," said the General, "it's beginning to sleet. You'd better have some sawdust down."

It took me a few minutes to order the sawdust, and when I returned, the other guests were already in the room, and Sally was waiting to go in to dinner on the arm of Governor Blenner, a slim, nervous-looking man, with a long iron-grey mustache. I took in Mrs. Tyler, a handsome widow, with a young face and snow-white hair, and we were no sooner seated than

she began to tell me a story she had heard about me that morning.

"Carry James told me she gave her little boy a penny and asked him what he meant to do with it. 'Ath Mithter Starr to thurn it into a quarther,' he replied."

"Oh, he thinks that easy now, but he'll find out differently some day," I returned.

She nodded brightly, with the interested, animated manner of a woman who realises that the burden of conversation lies, not on the man's shoulders, but on hers. While she ate her soup I knew that her alert mind was working over the subject which she intended to introduce with the next course. From the other end of the table Sally's eyes were raised to mine over the basket of roses and lilies. Jessy was listening to George Bolingbroke, who was telling a story about the races, while his eyes rested on Sally, with a dumb, pained look that made me suddenly feel very sorry for him. I knew that he still loved her, but until I saw that look in his eyes I had never understood what the loss of her must have meant in his life. Suppose I had lost her, and he had won, and I had sat and stared at her across her own dinner table with my secret written in my eyes for her husband to read. A fierce sense of possession swept over me, and I felt angered because his longing gaze was on her flushed cheeks and bare shoulders.

"No, no wine. I've drunk my last glass of wine unless I may hope for it in heaven," I heard the General say; "a little Scotch whiskey now and then will see me safely to my grave."

"From champagne to Scotch whiskey was a flat fall,

General," observed Mrs. Tyler, my sprightly neighbour.

"It's not so flat as the fall to Lithia water, though," retorted the General.

I was about to join vacantly in the laugh, when a sound in the doorway caused me to lift my eyes from my plate, and the next instant I sat paralysed by the figure that towered there over the palms and azaleas.

"Why, Benjy boy!" cried a voice, in a tone of joyous surprise, and while every head turned instantly in the direction of the words, the candles and the roses swam in a blur of colour before my eyes. Standing on the threshold, between two flowering azaleas, with a palm branch waving above his head, was President, my brother, who was a miner. Twenty years ago I had last seen him, and though he was rougher and older and greyer now, he had the same honest blue eyes and the same kind, sheepish face. The clothes he wore were evidently those in which he dressed himself for church on Sunday, and they made him ten times more awkward, ten times more ill at ease, than he would have looked in his suit of jeans.

"Why, Benjy boy!" he burst out again; "and little Jessy!"

I sprang to my feet, while a hot wave swept over me at the thought that for a single dreadful instant I had been ashamed of my brother. Already I had pushed back my chair, but before I could move from my place, Sally had walked the length of the table, and stood, tall and queenly, between the flowering azaleas, with her hand outstretched. There was no shame in her face, no embarrassment, no hesitation.

Before I could speak she had turned and come back to us, with her arm through President's, and never in my eyes had she appeared so noble, so high-bred, so thoroughly a Bland and a Fairfax as she did at that moment.

"Governor, this is my brother, Mr. Starr," she said in her low, clear voice. "Ben has not seen him for twenty years, so if you will pardon him, he will go upstairs with him to his room."

As I went toward her my glance swept the table for Jessy, and I saw that she was sitting perfectly still and colourless, crumbling a small piece of bread, while her eyes clung to the basket of roses and lilies.

"Well, Benjy boy!" exclaimed President, too full for speech, "and little Jessy!"

In spite of his awkwardness and his Sunday clothes, he looked so happy, so up-lifted by the sincerity of his affection above any false feeling of shame, that the tears sprang to my eyes as I clasped his hand.

The governor had risen to speak to him, the General had done likewise. By their side Sally stood with a smile on her face and her hand on the table. She was a Bland, after all, and the racial instinct within her had risen to meet the crisis. They recognised it, I saw, and they, whose blood was as blue as hers, responded generously to the call. Not one had failed her! Then my eyes fell on Jessy, sitting cold and silent, while she crumbled her bit of bread.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MAN AND THE CLASS

"I OUGHTN'T to have done it, Benjy," said President, following me with diffidence under the waving palm branches and up the staircase.

"Nonsense, President," I answered; "I'm awfully glad you've come. Only if I'd known about it, I'd have met you at the station."

"No, I oughtn't to have done it, Benjy," he repeated humbly, standing in a dejected attitude in the centre of the guest room next to Jessy's. He had entered nervously, as if he were stepping on glass, and when I motioned to a chair he shook his head and glanced uneasily at the delicate chintz covering.

"I'd better not sit down. I'm feared I'll hurt it."

"It's made to be sat in. You aren't going to stand up in the middle of the room all night, old fellow, are you?"

At this he appeared to hesitate, and a pathetic groping showed itself in his large, good-humoured face.

"You see, I've been down in the mines," he said, "an' anything so fancy makes my flesh crawl."

"I wish you'd give up that work. It's a shame to have you do it when I've got more money than I can find investments for."

"I'm a worker, Benjy, and I'll die a worker. Pa wa'nt a worker, and that's why he took to drink."

"Well, sit down now, and make yourself at home. I've got to go back downstairs, but I'll come up again the very minute that it's over."

Pushing him, in spite of his stubborn, though humble, resistance, into the depths of the chintz-covered chair, I went hurriedly back to the dinner-table, and took my seat beside Mrs. Tyler, who remarked with a tact which won me completely: —

"Mrs. Starr has been telling us such interesting things about your brother. He has a very fine head."

"By George, I'm glad I shook his hand," said the General, in his loud, kindly way. "Bring him to see me, Ben, I like a worker."

The terrible minute in which I had sat there, paralysed by the shame of acknowledging him, was still searing my mind. As I met Sally's eyes over the roses and lilies, I wondered if she had seen my cowardliness as I had seen Jessy's, and been repelled by it? When the dinner was over, and the last guest had gone, I asked myself the question again while I went upstairs to bring my brother from his retirement. As I opened the door, he started up from the chair in which I had placed him, and began rubbing his eyes as he followed me timidly out of the room. At the table Sally seated herself opposite to him, and talked in her simple, kindly manner while he ate his dinner.

"Pour his wine, Ben," she said, dismissing the butler, "there are too many frivolities, aren't there? I like a clear space, too."

Turning toward him she pushed gently away the

confusing decorations, and removed the useless number of forks from beside his plate. If the way he ate his soup and drank his wine annoyed her, there was no hint of it in her kind eyes and her untroubled smile. She, who was sensitive to the point of delicacy, I knew, watched him crumble his bread into his green turtle, and gulp down his sherry, with a glance which apparently was oblivious of the thing at which it looked. Jessy shrank gradually away, confessing presently that she had a headache and would like to go upstairs to bed; and when she kissed President's cheek, I saw aversion written in every line of her shrinking figure. Yet opposite to him sat Sally, who was a Bland and a Fairfax, and not a tremor, not the flicker of an eyelash, disturbed her friendly and charming expression. What was the secret of that exquisite patience, that perfect courtesy, which was confirmed by the heart, not by the lips? Did the hidden cause of it lie in the fact that it was not a manner, after all, but the very essence of a character, whose ruling spirit was exhaustless sympathy?

"I've told Benjy, ma'am," said President, selecting the largest fork by some instinct for appropriateness, "that I know I oughtn't to have done it."

"To have done what?" repeated Sally kindly.

"That I oughtn't to have come in on a party like that dressed as I am, and I so plain and uneddicated."

"You mustn't worry," she answered, bending forward in all the queenliness of her braided wreath and her bare shoulders, "you mustn't worry — not for a minute. It was natural that you should come to

your brother at once, and, of course, we want you to stay with us."

I had never seen her fail when social intuition guided her, and she did not fail now. He glanced down at his clothes in a pleased, yet hesitating, manner.

"These did very well on Sunday in Pocahontas," he said, "but somehow they don't seem to suit here; I reckon so many flowers and lights kind of dazzle my eyes."

"They do perfectly well," answered Sally, speaking in a firm, direct way as if she were talking to a child; "but if you would feel more comfortable in some of Ben's clothes, he has any number of them at your service. He is about your height, is he not?"

"To think of little Benjy growin' so tall," he remarked with a kind of ecstasy, and when we went into the library for a smoke, he insisted upon measuring heights with me against the ledge of the door. Then, alone with me and the cheerful crackling of the log fire, his embarrassment disappeared, and he began to ask a multitude of eager questions about myself and Jessy and my marriage.

"And so pa died," he remarked sadly, between the long whiffs of his pipe.

"I'm not sure it wasn't the best thing he ever did," I responded.

"Well, you see, Benjy, he wa'nt a worker, and when a man ain't a worker there's mighty little to stand between him and drink. Now, ma, she was a worker."

"And we got it from her. That's why we hate to be idle, I suppose."

"Did it ever strike you, Benjy," he enquired solemnly, after a minute, "that in the marriage of ma and pa the breeches were on the wrong one of 'em? Pa wa'nt much of a man, but he would have made a female that we could have been proud of. With all the good working qualities, we never could be proud of ma when we considered her as a female."

"Well, I don't know, but I think she was the best we ever had."

"We are proud of Jessy," he pursued reflectively.

"Yes, we are proud of Jessy," I repeated, and as I uttered the words, I remembered her beautiful blighted look, while she sat cold and silent, crumbling her bit of bread.

"And we are proud of you, Benjy," he added, "but you ain't any particular reason to be proud of me. You can't be proud of a man that ain't had an eddication."

"Well, the education doesn't make the man, you know."

"It does a good deal towards it. The stuffing goes a long way with the goose, as poor ma used to say. Do you ever think what ma would have been if she'd had an eddication? An eddication and breeches would have made a general of her. It must take a powerful lot of patience to stand being born a female."

He took a wad of tobacco from his pocket, eyed it timidly, and after glancing at the tiled hearth, put it back again.

"You know what I would do if I were a rich man, Benjy?" he said; "I'd buy a railroad."

"You'd have to be a very rich man, indeed, to do that."

"It's a little dead-beat road, the West Virginia and Wyanoke. I overheard two gentlemen talking about it yesterday in Pocahontas, and one of 'em had been down to look at those worked-out coal fields at Wyanoke. 'If I wa'nt in as many schemes as I could float, I'd buy up a control of that road,' said the one who had been there, 'you mark my words, there's better coal in those fields than has ever come out of 'em.' They called him Huntley, and he said he'd been down with an expert."

"Huntley?" I caught at the name, for he was one of the shrewdest promoters in the South. "If he thinks that, why didn't he get control of the road himself?"

"The other wanted him to. He said the time would come when they tapped the coal fields that the Great South Midland and Atlantic would want the little road as a feeder."

"So he believed the Wyanoke coal fields weren't worked out, eh?"

"He said they wa'nt even developed. You see it was all a secret, and they didn't pay any attention to me, because I was just a common miner."

"And couldn't buy a railroad. Well, President, if it comes to anything, you shall have your share. Meanwhile, I'll run out to Wyanoke and look around."

With the idea still in my mind, I went into the General's office next day, and told him that I had decided to accept the presidency of the Union Bank.

"Well, I'm sorry to lose you, Ben. Perhaps you'll come back to the road in another capacity when I am dead. It will be a bigger road then. We're buying up the Tennessee and Carolina, you know"

"It's a great road you've made, General, and I like to serve it. By the way, I'm going to West Virginia in a day or two to have a look at the West Virginia and Wyanoke. What do you know of the coal fields at Wyanoke?"

"No 'count ones. I wouldn't meddle with that little road if I were you. It will go bankrupt presently, and then we'll buy it, I suppose, at our own price. It runs through scrub land populated by old field pines. How is that miner brother of yours, Ben? I saw Sally at the theatre with him. You've got a jewel, my boy, there's no doubt of that. When I looked at her sailing down the room on his arm last night, by George, I wished I was forty years younger and married to her myself."

Some hours later I repeated his remark to Sally, when I went home at dusk and found her sitting before a wood fire in her bedroom, with her hat and coat on, just as she had dropped there after a drive with President.

"Well, I wouldn't have the General at any age. You needn't be jealous, Ben," she responded. "I'm too much like Aunt Matoaca."

"He always said you were," I retorted, "but, oh, Sally, you are an angel! When I saw you rise at dinner last night, I wanted to squeeze you in my arms and kiss you before them all."

The little scar by her mouth dimpled with the old childish expression of archness.

"Suppose you do it now, sir," she rejoined, with the primness of Miss Mitty, and a little later, "What else was there to do but rise, you absurd boy? Poor

mamma used to tell me that grandpapa always said to her, 'When in doubt choose the kindest way.'"

"And yet he disinherited his favourite daughter."

"Which only proves, my dear, how much easier it is to make a proverb than to practise it."

"Do you know, Sally," I began falteringly, after a minute, "there is something I ought to tell you, and that is, that when I looked up at the table last night and saw President in the doorway, my first feeling was one of shame."

She rubbed her cheek softly against my sleeve.

"Shall I confess something just as dreadful?" she asked. "When I looked up and saw him standing there my first feeling was exactly the same."

"Sally, I am so thankful."

"You wicked creature, to want me to be as bad as yourself."

"It couldn't have lasted with you but a second."

"It didn't, but a second is an hour in the mind of a snob."

"Well, we were both snobs together, and that's some comfort, anyway."

For the three days that President remained with us he wore my clothes, in which he looked more than ever like a miner attired for church, and carried himself with a resigned and humble manner.

Sally took him to the theatre and to drive with her in the afternoon, and I carried him to the General's office and over the Capitol, which he surveyed with awed and admiring eyes. Only Jessy still shrank from him, and not once during his visit were we able to prevail upon her to appear with him in the presence

of strangers. There was always an excuse ready to trip off her tongue — she had a headache, she was going to the dressmaker's, the milliner's, the dentist's even; and I honestly believe that she sought cheerfully this last place of torture as an escape. To the end, however, he regarded her with an affection that fell little short of adoration.

"Who'd have thought that little Jessy would have shot up into a regular beauty!" he exclaimed for the twentieth time as he stood ready to depart. "She takes arter pa, and I always said the only thing against pa was that he wa'nt born a female."

He kissed her good-by in a reverential fashion, and after a cordial, though exhausted, leave-taking from Sally, we went together to West Virginia. In spite of the General's advice, I had decided to take a look at the coal fields of Wyanoke, and a week later, when I returned to Richmond, I was the owner of a control of the little West Virginia and Wyanoke Railroad. It was a long distance from the presidency of the Great South Midland and Atlantic, but I watched still from some vantage ground in my imagination, the gleaming tracks of the big road sweeping straight on to the southern horizon.

For the next few years there was hardly a shadow on the smiling surface of our prosperity. Society had received us in spite of my father, in spite even of my brother; and the day that had made me Sally's husband had given me a place, if an alien one, in the circle in which she moved. I was there at last, and it was neither her fault nor mine if I carried with me into that stained-glass atmosphere something of the

consciousness of the market boy, who seemed to stand always at the kitchen door. Curiously enough there were instants even now when I felt vaguely aware that, however large I might appear to loom in my physical presence, a part of me was, in reality, still on the outside, hovering uncertainly beyond the threshold. There were things I had never learned — would never learn; things that belonged so naturally to the people with whom I lived that they seemed only aware of them when brought face to face with the fact of their absence. The lightness of life taught me nothing except that I was built in mind and in body upon a heavier plan. At the dinner-table, when the airy talk floated about me, I felt again and again that the sparkling trivialities settled like thistledown upon the solid mass I presented, and remained there because of my native inability to waft them back. It was still as impossible for me to entertain pretty girls in pink tarlatan as it had been on the night of my first party; and the memory of that disastrous social episode stung me at times when I stood large and awkward before a gay and animated maiden, or sat wedged in, like a massive block, between two patient and sleepy mothers. These people were all Sally's friends, not mine, and it was for her sake, I never forgot for a minute, that they had accepted me. With just such pleasant condescension they would still have accepted me, I knew, if I had, in truth, entered their company with my basket of potatoes or carrots on my arm. One alone held out unwaveringly through the years; for Miss Mitty, shut with her pride and her portraits in

the old grey house, obstinately closed her big mahogany doors against our repeated friendly advances. Sometimes at dusk, as I passed on the crooked pavement under the two great sycamores, I would glance up at the windows, where the red firelight glimmered on the small square panes, and fancy that I saw her long, oval face gazing down on me from between the parted lace curtains. But she made no sign of forgiveness, and when Sally went to see her, as she did sometimes, the old lady received her formally in the drawing-room, with a distant and stately manner. She, who was the mixture of a Bland and a Fairfax, sat enthroned upon her traditions, while we of the common, outside world walked by under the silvery boughs of her sycamores.

"Aunt Mitty has told Selim not to admit me," said Sally one day at luncheon. "I know she wasn't out in this dreadful March wind — she never leaves the house except in summer — and yet when I went there, he told me positively she was not at home. When I think of her all alone hour after hour with Aunt Matoaca's things around her, I feel as if it would break my heart. George says she is looking very badly."

"Does George see her?" I asked, glancing up from my cup of coffee, while I waited for the light to a cigar. "I didn't imagine he had enough attentions left over from his hunters to bestow upon maiden ladies."

The sugar tongs were in her hand, and she looked not at me, but at the lump of sugar poised above her cup, as she answered,

"He is so good."

"Good?" I echoed lightly; "do you call George good? The General thinks he's a sad scamp."

The lump of sugar dropped with a splash into her cup, and her eyes were dark as she raised them quickly to my face. Instinctively I felt, with a blind groping of perception, that I had wounded her pride, or her loyalty, or some other hereditary attribute of the Blands and the Fairfaxes that I could not comprehend.

"If I wanted an estimate of goodness, I don't think I'd go to the General as an authority," she retorted.

"I'm sorry you never liked him, Sally. He's a great man."

"Well, he isn't *my* great man anyway," she retorted. "I prefer Dr. Theophilus or George."

I laughed gayly. "The doctor is a mollycoddle and George is a fop." My tone was jaunty, yet her words were like the prick of a needle in a sensitive place. What was her praise of George except the confession of an appreciation of the very things that I could never possess? I knew she loved me and not George — was not her marriage a proof of this sufficient to cover a lifetime? — yet I knew also that the external graces which I treated with scorn because I lacked them, held for her the charm of habit, of association, of racial memory. Would the power in me that had captured her serve as well through a future of familiar possession as it had served in the supreme moment of conquest? I could not go through life, as I had once said, forever pushing a wheel up a hill, and the strength of a shoulder might prove, after all, less effective in the freedom of daily intercourse than the

quickness or delicacy of a manner. Would she begin to regret presently, I wondered, the lack in the man she loved of those smaller virtues which in the first rosy glow of romance had seemed to her insignificant and of little worth?

"There are worse things than a mollycoddle or a fop," she rejoined after a pause, and added quickly, while old Esdras left the dining-room to answer a ring at the bell, "That's either Bonny Page or George now. One of them is coming to take me out."

For a moment I hoped foolishly that the visitor might be Bonny Page, but the sound of George's pleasant drawling voice was heard speaking to old Esdras, and as the curtains swung back, he crossed the threshold and came over to take Sally's outstretched hand.

"You're lunching late to-day," he said. "I don't often find you here at this hour, Ben."

"No, I'm not a man-about-town like you," I replied, pushing the cigars and the lamp toward him; "the business of living takes up too much of my time."

He leaned over, without replying to me, his hand on the back of Sally's chair, his eyes on her face.

"It's all right, Sally," he said in a low voice, and when he drew back, I saw that he had laid a spray of sweet alyssum on the table beside her plate.

Her eyes shone suddenly as if she were looking at sunlight, and when she smiled up at him, there was an expression in her face, half gratitude, half admiration, that made it very beautiful. While I watched her, I tried to overcome an ugly irrational resentment

because George had been the one to call that tremulous new beauty into existence.

"How like you it was," she returned, almost in a whisper, with the spray of sweet alyssum held to her lips, "and how can I thank you?"

His slightly wooden features, flushed now with a fine colour, as if he had been riding in the March wind, softened until I hardly knew them. Standing there in his immaculate clothes, with his carefully groomed mustache hiding a trembling mouth, he had become, I realised vaguely, a George with whom the General and I possessed hardly so much as an acquaintance. The man before me was a man whom Sally had invoked into being, and it seemed to me, as I watched them, that she had awakened in George, who had lost her, some quality — inscrutable and elusive — that she had never aroused in the man to whom she belonged. What this quality was, or wherein it lay, I could not then define. Understanding, sympathy, perception, none of these words covered it, yet it appeared to contain and possess them all. The mere fact of its existence, and that I recognised without explaining it, had the effect of a barrier which separated me for the moment from my wife and the man to whom she was related by the ties of race and of class. Again I was aware of that sense of strangeness, of remoteness, which I had felt on the night of our home-coming when I had stood, spellbound, before Bonny Page's exquisite grooming and the shining gloss on her hair and boots. Something — a trifle, perhaps, had passed between Sally and George — and the reason I did not understand it was because

I belonged to another order and had inherited different perceptions from theirs. The trifle — whatever it was — appeared visibly, I knew, before us; it was evident and on the surface, and if I failed to discern it what did that prove except the shortness of the vision through which I looked? A physical soreness, like that of a new bruise, attacked my heart, and rising hastily from the table, I made some hurried apology and went out, leaving them alone together. Glancing back as I got into my overcoat in the hall, I saw that Sally still held the spray of sweet alyssum to her lips, and that the look George bent on her was transfigured by the tenderness that flooded his face with colour. She loved me, she was mine, and yet at this instant she had turned to another man for a keener comprehension, a subtler sympathy, than I could give. A passion, not of jealousy, but of hurt pride, throbbed in my heart, and by some curious eccentricity of emotion, this pride was associated with a rush of ambition, with the impelling desire to succeed to the fullest in the things in which success was possible. If I could not give what George gave, I would give, I told myself passionately, something far better. When the struggle came closer between the class and the individual, I had little doubt that the claims of tradition would yield as they had always done to the possession of power. Only let that power find its fullest expression, and I should stand to George Bolingbroke as the living present of action stands to the dead past of history. After all, what I had to give was my own, hewn by my own strength out of life, while the thing in which he ex-

celled was merely a web of delicate fibre woven by generations of hands that had long since crumbled to dust. Triumph over him, I resolved that I would in the end, and the way to triumph led, I knew, through a future of outward achievement to the dazzling presidency of the South Midland and Atlantic Railroad.

As time went on this passionate ambition, which was so closely bound up with my love for Sally, absorbed me even to the exclusion of the feeling from which it had drawn its greatest strength. The responsibilities of my position, the partial control of the large sums of money that passed through my hands, crowded my days with schemes and anxieties, and kept me tossing, sleepless yet with wearied brain, through many a night. For pleasure I had no time; Sally I saw only for a hurried or an absent-minded hour or two at meals, or when I came up too tired to think or to talk in the evenings. Often I fell asleep over my cigar after dinner, while she dressed and hastened, with her wreathed head and bare shoulders, to a reception or a ball. A third of my time was spent in New York, and during my absence, it never occurred to me to enquire how she filled her long, empty days. She was sure of me, she trusted me, I knew; and in the future, I told myself when I had leisure to think of it — next year, perhaps — I should begin again to play the part of an ardent lover. She was as desirable — she was far dearer to me than she had ever been in her life, but while I held her safe and close in my clasp, my mind reached out with its indomitable energy after the uncertain, the unattained. I had my wife — what I wanted now

was a fortune and a great name to lay at her feet.

And all these months did she ever question, ever ask herself, while she watched me struggling day after day with the lust for power, if the thing that I sought to give her would in the end turn to Dead Sea fruit at her lips? Question she may have done in her heart, but no hint of it ever reached me — no complaint of her marriage ever disturbed the outward serenity in which we lived. Yet, deep in myself, I heard always a still small voice, which told me that she demanded something far subtler and finer than I had given — something that belonged inherently to the nature of George Bolingbroke rather than to mine. Even now, though she loved me and not George, it was George who was always free, who was always amiable, who was always just ready and just waiting to be called. On another day, a month or two later, he came in again with his blossom of sweet alyssum, and again her eyes grew shining and grateful, while the old bruise throbbed quickly to life in my heart.

"Is it all right still?" she asked, and he answered, "All right," with his rare smile, which lent a singular charm to his softened features.

Then he glanced across at me and made, I realised, an effort to be friendly.

"You ought to get a horse, Ben," he remarked, "it would keep you from getting glum. If you'd hunted with us yesterday, you would have seen Bonny Page take a gate like a bird."

"I tried to follow," said Sally, "but Prince Charlie refused."

"You mean I wouldn't let go your bridle," returned George, in a half-playful, half-serious tone.

The bruise throbbed again. Here, also, I was shut out — I who had carried potatoes to George's door while he was off learning to follow the hounds. His immaculate, yet careless, dress; the perfection of his manner, which seemed to make him a part of the surroundings in which he stood; the very smoothness and slenderness of the hand that rested on Sally's chair — all these produced in me a curious and unreasonable sensation of anger.

"I forbid you to jump, Sally," I said, almost sharply; "you know I hate it."

She leaned forward, glancing first at me and then at George, with an expression of surprise.

"Why, what's the matter, Ben?" she asked. "He's a perfect bear, isn't he, George?"

"The best way to keep her from jumping," observed George, pleasantly enough, though his face flushed, "is to be on the spot to catch her bridle or her horse's mane or anything else that's handy. It's the only means I've found successful, for there was never a Bland yet who didn't go straight ahead and do the thing he was forbidden to. Miss Mitty told me with pride that she had been eating lobster, which she always hated, and I discovered her only reason was that the doctor had ordered her not to touch it."

"Then I shan't forbid, I'll entreat," I replied, recovering myself with an effort. "Please don't jump, Sally, I implore it."

"I won't jump if you'll come with me, Ben," she answered.

I laughed shortly, for how was it possible to explain to two Virginians of their blood and habits that a man of six feet two inches could not sit a horse for the first time without appearing ridiculous in the eyes even of the woman who loved him? They had grown up together in the fields or at the stables, and a knowledge of horse-flesh was as much a part of their birthright as the observance of manners. The one I could never acquire; the other I had attained unaided and in the face of the tremendous barriers that shut me out. The repeated insistence upon the fact that Sally was a Bland aroused in me, whenever I met it, an irritation which I tried in vain to dispel. To be a Bland meant, after all, simply to be removed as far as possible from any temperamental relation to the race of Starrs.

"I wish I could, dear," I answered, as I rose to go out, "but remember, I've never been on a horse in my life and it's too late to begin."

"Oh, I forgot. Of course you can't," she rejoined. "So if George isn't strong enough to hold me back, I'll have to go straight after Bonny."

"I promise you I'll swing on with all my might, Ben," said George, with a laugh in which I felt there was an amiable condescension, as from the best horseman in his state to a man who had never ridden to hounds.

A little later, as I walked down the street, past the old grey house, under the young budding leaves of the sycamores, the recollection of this amiable condescension returned to me like the stab of a knife. The image of Sally, mounted on Prince Charlie, at George's

side, troubled my thoughts, and I wondered, with a pang, if the people who saw them together would ask themselves curiously why she had chosen me. To one and all of them, — to Miss Mitty, to Bonny Page, to Dr. Theophilus, — the mystery, I felt, was as obscure to-day as it had been in the beginning of our love. Why was it? I questioned angrily, and wherein lay the subtle distinction which divided my nature from George Bolingbroke's and even from Sally's? The forces of democracy had made way for me, and yet was there something stronger than democracy — and this something, fine and invincible as a blade, I had felt long ago in the presence of Miss Mitty and Miss Matoaca. Over my head, under the spreading boughs of the sycamore, a window was lifted, and between the parted lace curtains, the song of Miss Mitty's canary floated out into the street. As the music entered my thoughts, I remembered suddenly the box of sweet alyssum blooming on the window-sill under the swinging cage, and there flashed into my consciousness the meaning of the flowers George had laid beside Sally's plate. For her sake he had gone to Miss Mitty in the sad old house, and that little blossom was the mute expression of a service he had rendered joyfully in the name of love. The gratitude in Sally's eyes was made clear to me, and a helpless rage at my own blindness, my own denseness, flooded my heart. George, because of some inborn fineness of perception, had discerned the existence of a sorrow in my wife to which I, the man whom she loved and who loved her, had been insensible. He had understood and had comforted — while I, engrossed in

larger matters, had gone on my way unheeding and indifferent. Then the anger against myself turned blindly upon George, and I demanded passionately if he would stand forever in my life as the embodiment of instincts and perceptions that the generations had bred? Would I fail forever in little things because I had been cursed at birth by an inability to see any except big ones? And where I failed would George be always ready to fill the unspoken need and to bestow the unasked-for sympathy?

CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH I WALK ON THIN ICE

On a November evening, when we had been married several years, I came home after seven o'clock, and found Sally standing before the bureau while she fastened a bunch of violets to the bosom of her gown.

"I'm sorry I couldn't get up earlier, but there's a good deal of excitement over a failure in Wall Street," I said. "Are you going out?"

Her hands fell from her bosom, and as she turned toward me, I saw that she was dressed as though for a ball.

"Not to-night, Ben. I had an engagement, but I broke it because I wanted to spend the evening with you. I thought we might have a nice cosy time all by ourselves."

"What a shame, darling. I've promised Bradley I'd do a little work with him in my study. He's coming at half-past eight and will probably keep me till midnight. I'll have to hurry. Did you put on that gorgeous gown just for me?"

"Just for you." There was an expression on her face, half humorous, half resentful, that I had never seen there before. "What day is this, Ben?" she asked, as I was about to enter my dressing-room.

"The nineteenth of November," I replied carelessly, looking back at her with my hand on the door.

"The nineteenth of November," she echoed slowly, as if saying the words to herself.

I was already on the threshold when light broke on me in a flash, and I turned, blind with remorse, and seized her in my arms.

"Sally, Sally, I am a brute!"

She laughed a little, drawing away, not coming closer.

"Ben, are you happy?"

"As happy as a king. I'll telephone Bradley not to come."

"Is it important?"

"Yes, very important. That failure I told you of is a pretty serious matter."

"Then let him come. All days are the same, after all, when one comes to think of it."

Her hand went to the violets at her breast, and as my eyes followed it, a sudden intuitive dread entered my mind like an impulse of rage.

"I intended to send you flowers, Sally, but in the rush, I forgot. Whose are those you are wearing?"

She moved slightly, and the perfume of the violets floated from the cloud of lace on her bosom.

"George sent them," she answered quietly.

Before she spoke I had known it — the curse of my life was to be that George would always remember — and the intuitive dread I had felt changed, while I stood there, to the dull ache of remorse.

"Take them off, and I'll get you others if there's a shop open in the city," I said. Then, as she hesitated, wavering between doubt and surprise, I left the room, descended the steps with a rush, and picking up my hat, hurried in search of a belated florist who had not

closed. At the corner a man, going out to dine, paused to fasten his overcoat under the electric light, which blazed fitfully in the wind; and as I approached and he looked up, I saw that it was George Bolingbroke.

"It's time all sober married men were at home dressing for dinner," he observed in a whimsical tone.

The wind had brought a glow of colour into his face, and he looked very handsome as he stood there, in his fur-lined coat, under the blaze of light.

"I was kept late down town," I replied. "The General and I get all the hard knocks while you take it easy."

"Well, I like an easy world, and I believe your world is pretty much about what you make it. Where are you rushing? Do you go my way?"

"No, I'm turning off here. There's something I forgot this morning and I came out to attend to it."

"Don't fall into the habit of forgetting. It's a bad one and it's sure to grow on you — and whatever you forget," he added with a laugh as we parted, "don't forget for a minute of your life that you've married Sally."

He passed on, still laughing pleasantly, and quickening my steps, I went to the corner of Broad Street, where I found a florist's shop still lighted and filled with customers. There were no violets left, and while I waited for a sheaf of pink roses, with my eyes on the elaborate funeral designs covering the counter, I heard a voice speaking in a low tone beyond a mass of flowering azalea beside which I stood.

"Yes, her mother married beneath her, also," it said; "that seems to be the unfortunate habit of the Blands."

I turned quickly, my face hot with anger, and as I did so my eyes met those of a dark, pale lady, through the thick rosy clusters of the azalea. When she recognised me, she flushed slightly, and then moving slowly around the big green tub that divided us, she held out her hand with a startled and birdlike flutter of manner.

"I missed you at the reception last night, Mr. Starr," she said; "Sally was there, and I had never seen her looking so handsome."

Then as the sheaf of roses was handed to me, she vanished behind the azaleas again, while I turned quickly away and carried my fragrant armful out into the night.

When I reached home, I was met on the staircase by Jessy, who ran, laughing, before me to Sally, with the remark that I had come back bringing an entire rose garden in my hands.

"There weren't any violets left, darling," I said, as I entered and tossed the flowers on the couch, "and even these roses aren't fresh."

"Well, they're sweet anyway, poor things," she returned, gathering them into her lap, while her hands caressed the half-opened petals. "It was like you, Ben, when you did remember, to bring me the whole shopful."

Breaking one from the long stem, she fastened it in place of the violets in the cloud of lace on her bosom.

"Pink suits me better, after all," she remarked gayly; "and now you must let Bradley come, and Jessy and I will go to the theatre."

"I suppose he'll have to come," I said moodily,

"but I'll be up earlier to-morrow, Sally, if I wreck the bank in order to do it."

All the next day I kept the importance of fulfilling this promise in my mind, and at five o'clock, I abruptly broke off a business appointment to rush breathlessly home in the hope of finding Sally ready to walk or to drive. As I turned the corner, however, I saw, to my disappointment, that several riding horses were waiting under the young maples beside the pavement, and when I entered the house, I heard the merry flutelike tones of Bonny Page from the long drawing-room, where Sally was serving tea.

For a minute the unconquerable shyness I always felt in the presence of women held me, rooted in silence, on the threshold. Then, "Is that you, Ben?" floated to me in Sally's voice, and pushing the curtains aside, I entered the room and crossed to the little group gathered before the fire. In the midst of it, I saw the tall, almost boyish figure of Bonny Page, and the sight of her gallant air and her brilliant, vivacious smile aroused in me instantly the oppressive self-consciousness of our first meeting. I remembered suddenly that I had dressed carelessly in the morning, that I had tied my cravat in a hurry, that my coat fitted me badly and I had neglected to send it back. All the innumerable details of life — the little things I despised or overlooked — swarmed, like stinging gnats, into my thoughts while I stood there.

"You're just in time for tea, Ben," said Sally; "it's a pity you don't drink it."

"And you're just in time for a scolding," remarked Bonny. "Do you know, if I had a husband who

wouldn't ride with me, I'd gallop off the first time I went hunting with another man."

"You'd better start, Ben. It wouldn't take you three days to follow Bonny over a gate," said Ned Marshall, one of her many lovers, eager, I detected at once, to appear intimate and friendly. He was a fine, strong, athletic young fellow, with a handsome, smooth-shaven face, a slightly vacant laugh, and a figure that showed superbly in his loose-fitting riding clothes.

"When I get the time, I'll buy a horse and begin," I replied; "but all hours are working hours to me now, Sally will tell you."

"It's exactly as if I'd married a railroad engine," remarked Sally, laughing, and I realised by the strained look in their faces, that this absorption in larger matters — this unchangeable habit of thought that I could not shake off even in a drawing-room — puzzled them, because of their inherent incapacity to understand how it could be. My mind, which responded so promptly to the need for greater exertions, was reduced to mere leaden weight by this restless movement of little things. And this leaden weight, this strained effort to become something other than I was by nature, was reflected in the smiling faces around me as in a mirror. The embarrassment in my thoughts extended suddenly to my body, and I asked myself the next minute if Sally contrasted my heavy silence with the blithe self-confidence and the sportive pleasantries of Ned Marshall? Was she beginning already, unconsciously to her own heart, perhaps, to question if the passion I had given her would suffice to cover in her life the absence of the unspoken harmony in

outward things? With the question there rose before me the figure of George Bolingbroke, as he bent over and laid the blossom of sweet alyssum beside her plate; and, as at the instant in which I had watched him, I felt again the physical soreness which had become a part of my furious desire to make good my stand.

When Bonny and Ned Marshall had mounted and ridden happily away in the dusk, Sally came back with me from the door, and stood, silent and pensive, for a moment, while she stroked my arm.

"You look tired, Ben. If you only wouldn't work so hard."

"I must work. It's the only thing I'm good for."

"But I see so little of you and — and I get so lonely."

"When I've won out, I'll stop, and then you shall see me every living minute of the day, if you choose."

"That's so far off, and it's now I want you. I'd like you to take me away, Ben — to take me somewhere just as you did when we were married."

Her face was very soft in the firelight, and stooping, I kissed her cheek as she looked up at me, with a grave, almost pensive smile on her lips.

"I wish I could, sweetheart, but I'm needed here so badly that I don't dare run off for a day. You've married a working-man, and he's obliged to stick to his place."

She said nothing more to persuade me, but from that evening until the spring, when our son was born, it seemed to me that she retreated farther and farther into that pale dream distance where I had first seen and desired her. With the coming of the child I got her

back to earth and to reality, and when the warm little body, wrapped in flannels, was first placed in my arms, it seemed to me that the thrill of the mere physical contact had in it something of the peculiar starlike radiance of my bridal night. Sally, lying upon the pillow under a blue satin coverlet, smiled up at me with flushed cheeks and eyes shining with love, and while I stood there, some divine significance in her look, in her helplessness, in the oneness of the three of us drawn together in that little circle of life, moved my heart to the faint quiver of apprehension that had come to me while I stood by her side before the altar in old Saint John's.

When she was well, and the long, still days of the summer opened, little Benjamin was wrapped in a blue veil and taken in Aunt Euphronasia's arms to visit Miss Mitty in the old grey house.

"What did she say, mammy? How did she receive him?" asked Sally eagerly, when the old negress returned.

"She ain' said nuttin' 'tall, honey, cep'n 'huh,'" replied Aunt Euphronasia, in an aggrieved and resentful tone. "Dar she wuz a-settin' jes' ez prim by de side er dat ar box er sweet alyssum, en ez soon ez I lay eyes on her, I said, 'Howdy, Miss Mitty, hyer's Marse Ben's en Miss Sally's baby done come to see you.' Den she kinder turnt her haid, like oner dese yer ole wedder cocks on a roof, en she looked me spang in de eye en said 'huh' out right flat jes' like dat."

"But didn't you show her his pretty blue eyes, mammy?" persisted Sally.

"Go way f'om hyer, chile, Miss Mitty done seen de

eyes er a baby befo' now. I knowed dat, en I lowed in my mind dat you ain' gwinter git aroun' her by pretendin' you kin show her nuttin'. So I jes' begin ter sidle up ter her en kinder talk sof' ez ef'n I 'uz a-talkin' ter myself. 'Dish yer chile is jes' de spi't er Marse Bland,' I sez, 'en dar ain' noner de po' wite trash in de look er him needer.'"

"Aunt Euphronasia, how dare you!" said Sally, sternly.

"Well, 'tis de trufe, ain't hit? Dar ain' nuttin er de po' wite trash in de look er him, is dar?"

"And what did she say then, Aunt Euphronasia?"

"Who? Miss Mitty? She sez 'huh' again jes' ez she done befo'. Miss Mitty ain't de kind dat's gwinter eat her words, honey. W'at she sez, she sez, en she's gwinter stick up ter hit. The hull time I 'uz dar, I ain' never yearn nuttin' but 'huh!' pass theo her mouf."

"I knew she was proud, Ben, but I didn't know she was so cruel as to visit it on this precious angel," said Sally, on the point of tears; "and I believe Jessy is the same way. Nobody cares about him except his doting mother."

"What's become of his doting father?"

"Oh, his doting father is entirely too busy with his darling stocks."

"Sally," I asked seriously, "don't you understand that all this — everything I'm doing — is just for you and the boy?"

"Is it, Ben?" she responded, and the next minute, "Of course, I understand it. How could I help it?"

She was always reasonable — it was one of her great

est charms, and I knew that if I were to open my mind to her at the moment, she would enter into my troubles with all the insight of her resourceful sympathy. But I kept silence, restrained by some masculine instinct that prompted me to shut the business world outside the doors of home.

"Well, I must go down town, dear; I don't see much of you these days, do I?"

"Not much, but I know you're here to stay and that's a good deal of comfort."

"I'm glad you've got the baby. He keeps you company."

She looked up at me with the puzzling expression, half humour, half resentment, I had seen frequently in her face of late. If she stopped to question whether I really imagined that a child of three months was all the companionship required by a woman of her years, she let no sign of it escape the smiling serenity of her lips. On her knees little Benjamin lay perfectly quiet while he stared straight up at the ceiling with his round blue eyes like the eyes of an animated doll.

"Yes, he is company," she answered gently; and stooping to kiss them both, I ran downstairs, hurried into my overcoat, and went out into the street.

As I closed the door behind me, I saw the General's buggy turning the corner, and a minute later he drew up under the young maples beside the pavement, and made room for me under the grey fur rug that covered his knees.

"I don't like the way things are behaving in Wall Street, Ben," he said. "Did that last smash cost you anything?"

"About two hundred thousand dollars, General, but I hadn't spoken of it."

"I hope the bank hasn't been loaning any more money to the Cumberland and Tidewater. I meant to ask you about that several days ago."

"The question comes up before the directors this afternoon. We'll probably refuse to advance any further loans, but they've already drawn on us pretty heavily, you understand, and we may have to go in deeper to save what we've got."

"Well, it looks pretty shaky, that's all I've got to say. If Jenkins doesn't butt in and reorganise it, it will probably go into the hands of a receiver before the year is up. Is it the bank or your private investments you've been worrying over?"

"My own affairs entirely. You see I'd dealt pretty largely through Cross and Hankins, and I don't know exactly what their failure will mean to me."

"A good many men in the country are asking themselves that question. A smash like that isn't over in a day or a night. But I'm afraid you've been spending too much money, Ben. Is your wife extravagant?"

"No, it's my own fault. I've never liked her to consider the value of money."

"It's a bad way to begin. Women have got it in their blood, and I remember my poor mother used to say she never felt that a dollar was worth anything until she spent it. If I were you, I'd pull up and go slowly, but it's mighty hard to do after you've once started at a gallop."

"I don't think I'll have any trouble, but I hate like the deuce to speak of it to Sally."

"That's your damned delicacy. It puts me in mind of my cousin, Jenny Tyler, who married that scamp who used to throw his boots at her. Once when she was a girl she stayed with us for a summer, and old Judge Lacy, one of the ugliest men of his day, fell over head and heels in love with her. She couldn't endure the sight of him, and yet, if you'll believe my word, though she was as modest as an angel, I actually found him kissing her one day in a summer-house. 'Bless my soul, Jenny!' I exclaimed, 'why didn't you tell that old baboon to stop hugging you and behave himself?' 'O Cousin George,' she replied, blushing the colour of a cherry, 'I didn't like to mention it.' Now, that's the kind of false modesty you've got, Ben."

"Well, you see, General," I responded when he had finished his sly chuckle, "I've always felt that money was the only thing that I had to offer."

"You may feel that way, Ben, but I don't believe that Sally does. My honest opinion is that it means a lot more to you than it does to her. There never was a Bland yet that didn't look upon money as a vulgar thing. I've known Sally's grandfather to refuse to invite a man to his house when the only objection he had to him was that he was too rich to be a gentleman. If you think it's wealth or luxury or their old house that the Blands pride themselves on, you haven't learned a thing about 'em in spite of the fact that you've married into the family. What they're proud of is that they can do without any of these things; they've got something else — whatever it is — that they consider a long sight better. Miss Mitty Bland would still have it if she went in rags and did her own cook-

ing, and it's this, not any material possessions, that makes her so terribly important. Look here, now, you take my advice and go home and tell Sally to stop spending money. How's that boy of yours? Is he wanting to become a bank president already?"

The old grey horse, rounding the corner at an amble, came suddenly to a stop as he recognised the half-grown negro urchin waiting upon the pavement. As if moved by a mechanical spring, the General's expression changed at once from its sly and jolly good nature to the look of capable activity which marked the successful man of affairs. The twinkle in his little bloodshot eyes narrowed to a point of steel, the loose lines of his mouth, which was the mouth of a generous libertine, grew instantly sober, and even his crimson neck, sprawling over his puffy, magenta-coloured tie, stiffened into an appearance of pompous dignity.

"Look sharp about the Cumberland and Tidewater, Ben," he remarked as he turned to limp painfully into the railroad office. Then the glass doors swung together behind him, and he forgot my existence, while I crossed the street in a rush and entered the Union Bank, which was a block farther down on the opposite side.

On the way home that afternoon, I told myself with determination that I would tell Sally frankly about the money I had lost; but when a little later she slipped her hand into my arm, and led me into the nursery to show me a trunk filled with baby's clothes that had come down from New York, my courage melted to air, and I could not bring myself to dispel the pretty excitement with which she laid each separate tiny garment upon the bed.

"Oh, of course, you don't enjoy them, Ben, as I do, but isn't that little embroidered cloak too lovely?"

"Lovely, dear, only I've had a bad day, and I'm tired."

"Poor boy, I know you are. Here, we'll put them away. But first there's something really dreadful I've got to tell you."

"Dreadful, Sally?"

"Yes, but it isn't about us. Do you know, I honestly believe that Jessy intends to marry Mr. Cottrel."

"What? That old rocking-horse? Why, he's a Methusalah, and knock-kneed into the bargain."

"It doesn't matter. Nothing matters to her except clothes. I've heard of women who sold themselves for clothes, and I believe she's one of them."

"Well, we're an eccentric family," I said wearily, "and she's the worst."

At any other time the news would probably have excited my indignation, but as I sat there, in the wicker rocking-chair, by the nursery fire, I was too exhausted to resent any manifestation of the family spirit. The last week had been a terrible strain, and there were months ahead which I knew would demand the exercise of every particle of energy that I possessed. In the afternoon there was to be a meeting of the directors of the bank, called to discuss the advancing of further loans to the Cumberland and Tidewater Railroad, and at eight o'clock I had promised to work for several hours with Bradley, my secretary. To go slowly now was impossible. My only hope was that by going fast enough I might manage to save what remained of the situation.

As the winter passed I went earlier to my office and came up later. Failure succeeded failure in Wall Street, and the whole country began presently to send back echoes of the prolonged crash. The Cumberland and Tidewater Railroad, to which we had refused a further loan, went into the hands of a receiver, and the Great South Midland and Atlantic immediately bought up the remnants at its own price. The General, who had been jubilant about the purchase, relapsed into melancholy a week later over the loss of "a good third" of his personal income.

"I'm an old fool or I'd have stopped dabbling in speculations and put away a nest-egg for my old age," he remarked, wiping his empurpled lids on his silk handkerchief. "No man over fifty ought to be trusted to gamble in stocks. Thank God, I'm the one to suffer, however, and not the road. If there's a more solid road in the country, Ben, than the South Midland, I've got to hear of it. It's big, but it's growing — swallowing up everything that comes in its way, like a regular boa constrictor. Think what it was when I came into it immediately after the war; and to-day it's one of the few roads that is steadily increasing its earnings in spite of this blamed panic."

"You worked regeneration, General, as I've often told you."

"Well, I'm too old to see what it's coming to. I hope a good man will step into my place after I'm gone. I'm sometimes sorry you didn't stick by me, Ben."

He spoke of the great road in a tone of regretful sentiment which I had never found in his allusions to

his lost Matoaca. The romance of his life, after all, was not a woman, but a railroad, and his happiest memory was, I believe, not the Sunday upon which he had stood beside the rose-lined bonnet of his betrothed and sung lustily out of the same hymn-book, but the day when the stock of the Great South Midland and Atlantic had sold at 180 in the open market.

"I'll tell you what, my boy," he remarked with a quiver of his lower lip, which hung still farther away from his bloodless gum, "a woman may go back on you, and the better the woman the more likely she is to do it, — but a road won't, — no, not if it is a good road."

"Well, I'm not getting much return out of the West Virginia and Wyanoke just now," I replied. "It's no fun being a little road at the mercy of a big one when the big one is a boa constrictor. Even if you get a fair division of the rates, you don't get your cars when you want them."

"The moral of that," returned the General, with a chuckle, "is, to quote from my poor old mammy again, 'Don't hatch until you're ready to hatch whole.'"

We parted with a laugh, and I dismissed the affairs of the little railroad as I entered my office at the bank, where my private wire immediately ticked off the news of a state of panic in the money market. That was in February, and it was not until the end of March that the ice on which I was walking cracked under my feet and I went through.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH I GO DOWN

I HAD just risen from breakfast on the last day of March when I was called to the telephone by Cummins, the cashier of the bank.

"Things are going pretty queer down here. Looks as if a run were beginning. Some old fool started it after reading about that failure of the Darlington Trust Company in New York. Wish you'd hurry."

"Call up the directors, and look here! — pay out all deposits slowly until I get there."

The telephone rang off, and picking up my hat, I went down the front steps to the carriage, which had been ordered by Sally for an early appointment. As I stepped in, she appeared in her hat and coat and joined me.

"Drive to the bank, Micah," I said, "I want to get there like lightning."

"Can you wait till I speak to mammy? She is bringing the baby."

For the first time since our marriage my nerves got the better of me, and I answered her sharply.

"No, I can't wait — not a minute, not a second. Drive on, Micah."

In obedience to my commands, Micah touched the horses, and as we sped down Franklin Street, Sally

looked at me with an expression which reminded me of the faint wonder under the fixed smile about Miss Mitty's mouth.

"What's the matter, Ben? Are you working too hard?" she enquired.

"I'm tired and I'm anxious. Do you realise that we are living in the midst of a panic?"

"Are we?" she asked quietly, and arranged the fur rug over her knees.

"Do you mean to tell me you hadn't heard it?" I demanded, in pure amazement that the thing which had possessed me to madness for three months should have escaped the consciousness of the wife with whom I lived.

"How was I to hear of it? You never told me, and I seldom read the papers now since the baby came. Of course I knew something was wrong. You were looking so badly and so much older."

To me it had needed no telling, because it had become suddenly the most obvious fact in the world in which I moved. Only a fool would gaze up at the sky during a storm burst and remark to a bystander, "It thunders." Yet even now I saw that what she realised was not the gravity of the financial crisis, but its injurious effect upon my health and my appearance.

"You've been on too great a strain," she remarked sympathetically; "when it's all over you must come away and we'll go to Florida in the General's car."

To Florida! and at that instant I was struggling in the grip of failure — the failure of the successful financier, which is of all failures the hardest. Not a few retrenchments, not the economy of a luxury here

and there, but ultimate poverty was the thing that I faced while I sat beside her on the soft cushions under the rich fur rug. One by one the familiar houses whirled by me. I saw the doors open and shut, the people come out of them, the sunshine fall through the budding trees on the sidewalk; and the houses and the moving people and the budding trees, all seemed to me detached and unreal, as if they stood apart somewhere in a world of quiet, while I was sucked in by the whirlpool. Though I lifted my voice and called aloud to them, I felt that the people I passed would still go quietly in and out of the opening doors in the placid spring sunshine.

"There's Bonny Page," said Sally, waving her hand; "she's to marry Ned Marshall next month, you know, and they are going to Europe. Did you notice that baby in the carriage — the one with blue bows and the Irish lace afghan? — it is Bessy Munford's, — the handsomest in town, they say, after little Benjamin."

The sight of the baby carriage, with its useless blue fripperies, trundled on the pavement under the budding trees, had aroused in me a sudden ridiculous anger, as though it represented the sinful extravagance of an entire nation. That silly carriage with its blue ribbons and its lace coverlet! And over the whole country factory after factory was shutting down, and thousands of hungry mothers and children were sitting on door-steps in this same sunshine. My nerves were bad. It had been months since I had a good night's sleep, and I knew that in the condition of my temper a trifle might be magnified out of all due proportion to its relative significance.

The horses stopped at the bank, and Sally leaned out to bow smilingly to one of the directors, who was coming along the sidewalk.

"I never saw so many people about here, Ben," she remarked; "it looks exactly as if it were a theatre. Ah, there's the General now going into his office. He hobbles so badly, doesn't he? When do you think you'll be home?"

"I don't know," I returned shortly, "perhaps at midnight — perhaps next week."

My tone brought a flush to her cheek, and she looked at me with the faint wonder that I had seen first on the face of Miss Mitty when I went in to breakfast with her on that autumn morning. It was the look of race, of the Bland breeding, of the tradition that questioned, not violently, but gently, "Can this be possible?"

She drove on without replying to me, and as I entered my office, the faces of Miss Mitty and of Sally were confused into one by my disordered mind.

The run had already started — a depositor, who had withdrawn ten thousand dollars after reading of the failure of the Darlington Trust Company, had been paid off first, and following him the line had come, crawling like black ants on the pavement. As I entered the doors, it seemed to me that the face of each man or woman in the throng stood out, separate and distinct, as though an electric search-light had passed over it; and I saw one and all, frightened, satisfied, or merely ludicrous, with a vividness of perception which failed me when I remembered the features of my own wife.

"We can pay them off slowly till three o'clock," said Bingley, the vice-president, whom I found, with

five or six of the directors, already in my office. "I've got only one paying teller's window open. The trouble, of course, began with the small accounts, of which we carry such a blamed lot. Mark my words, it is the little depositor that endangers a bank."

He looked nervous, and swallowed hastily while he talked, as if he had just rushed in from breakfast, with his last mouthful still unchewed. As I entered and faced the men sitting in different attitudes, but all wearing the same strained and helpless expression, a feeling of irritation swept over me, and I paused in the middle of the floor, with my hat and a folded newspaper in my hand.

"A quarter of a million in hard cash would tide us over, I believe," pursued Bingley, swallowing faster; "but the question is how in thunder are we to lay hands on it by nine o'clock to-morrow morning?"

I drew out my watch, and with the simple, mechanical action, I was conscious of an immediate quickening of the blood, a clearing of the brain. A certain readiness for decision, a power of dealing with an emergency, of handling a crisis, a response of pulse and brain to the call for action, stood me service now as in every difficult instant of my career. They were picked business men and shrewd financiers before me, yet I was aware that I dominated them, all and each, by some quality of force, of aggressiveness, of inflated self-confidence. The secret of my success, I had once said to the General, was that I began to get cool when I saw other people getting scared.

"It is now a quarter of ten, gentlemen," I said,

"and I pledge my word of honour that I will have a quarter of a million dollars in bank by ten o'clock tomorrow."

"For God's sake, Ben, where is it coming from?" demanded Judge Kenton, an old Confederate, with the solemn face I had sometimes watched him assume in church during the singing of the hymns. As I looked at him the humour of his expression struck me, and I broke into a laugh.

"I beg your pardon," I returned the next minute, "but I'll get it — somewhere — if it's in the city."

One of the men — I forget which, though I remember quite clearly that he wore a red necktie — got up from the table and slapped me on the shoulder.

"Go ahead, Ben, and get it," he said. "We take your word."

On the pavement the crowd had thickened, and when it caught sight of me, a confused murmur rose, and I was surrounded by half-hysterical women. The trouble, as Bingley had said, had begun with the small depositors; and in the line that pressed now like black ants to the doors, there were many evidently who had entrusted their nest-eggs to us for safe-keeping. I was not gentle by nature, and the sight of a woman's tears always aroused in me, not the angel, but the brute. For five years I had been married to a descendant of the Blands and the Fairfaxes, and yet, as I stood there, held at bay, in the midst of those sobbing women, the veneer of refinement peeled off from me, and the raw strength of the common man showed on the surface, and triumphed again as it had triumphed over the frightened directors in my office.

"What are you whining about?" I said with a laugh, "your money is all there. Go in and get it."

An old woman in a plaid shawl, with her mouth twisted sideways by a recent stroke of paralysis, barred my way with an outstretched hand, in which she held the foot of a grey yarn stocking.

"I'd laid it up for my old age, Mister," she mumbled through her toothless gums, "an' they told me it was safer in the bank, so I put it there. But I reckon I'd feel easier if I had it back — I reckon I'd feel easier."

"Then go after it," I replied harshly, pushing her out of my way. "If you don't get it before I come back, I'll give it to you with my own hands."

For a minute my presence subdued the crowd; but the panic terror had gripped it, and while I crossed the street the hysterical murmurs were in my ears. A desire to turn and throttle the sound as I might a howling wild beast took possession of me. It was true, I suppose, as Dr. Theophilus had once told me, that the quality I lacked was tenderness.

The General fortunately was alone in his private office, and when I went in he glanced up enquiringly from a railroad report he was reading.

"It's you, Ben, is it?" he remarked, and went back to his paper.

"General," I said bluntly, and stopped short in the centre of the room, "I want a quarter of a million dollars in cash by nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

For a moment he sat speechless, blinking at me with his swollen eyelids, while his lower lip protruded angrily, like the lip of a crying child. Then the old war-horse in him responded gallantly to the scent of battle.

"Damn you, Ben, do you know cash is as tight as wax?" he enquired. "You ain't dozing in the midst of a panic?"

"There's trouble at the bank," I replied. "A run has started, but so far it is almost entirely among the small depositors. We can manage to pay off till three o'clock, and if we open to-morrow with a quarter of a million, we shall probably keep on our feet, unless the excitement spreads."

"When do you want it?"

"By nine o'clock to-morrow morning; and I want it, General," I added, "on my personal credit."

He rose from his chair and stood swaying unsteadily on his gouty foot.

"I'll give you every penny that I've got, Ben," he answered, "but it ain't that much."

"You have access to the cash of both the Tilden Bank and the Bonfield Trust Company. If there's a dollar in the city you can get it."

A hint of his sly humour appeared for an instant in his eyes. "It wasn't any longer ago than breakfast that I remarked I didn't believe there was a blamed dollar in the whole country," he returned. Then his swaying stopped and he became invested suddenly with the dignity of the greatest financier in the state.

"Hand me my stick, Ben, and I'll go and see what I can do about it," he said.

I gave him his stick and my arm, and with my assistance he limped to the offices of the Bonfield Trust Company on the next block. When I returned to the bank the directors were talking excitedly, but at my entrance a hush fell, and they sat looking at me with a

row of vacant, expectant faces that waited apparently to be filled with expression.

"By ten o'clock to-morrow morning," I said, "a quarter of a million in cash will be brought in through the door in bags."

"I told you he'd do it," exclaimed Bingley, as he grasped my hand, "and I hope to God it will stay 'em off."

"You need a drink, Ben," observed Judge Kenton, "and so do I. Let's go and get it. A soft-boiled egg was all I had for breakfast, and I've gone faint."

I remember that I went to a restaurant with him, that a few old women sitting on the curbing spoke to us as we passed, that we ate oysters, and returned in half an hour to another meeting, that we discussed ways and means until eight o'clock and decided nothing. I know also that when we came out again several of the old women were still crouching there, and that when they came whining up to me, I turned on them with an oath and ordered them to be off. As clearly as if it were yesterday, I can see still the long, solemn face of the Judge as he glanced up at me, and I see written upon it something of the faint wonder that I had grown to regard as the peculiar look of the Blands.

I had telephoned Sally not to wait, and when I reached home I found that she had dismissed the servants and was preparing a little supper for me herself. While she served me, I sat perfectly silent, too exhausted to talk or to think, trying in vain to remember the more important events of the day. Only once did Sally speak, and that was to beg me to eat the slice of cold turkey she had laid on my plate.

"I'm not hungry, I got something with Judge Kenton down town," I returned as I pushed back my chair and rose from the table; "what I need is sleep, sleep, sleep. If I don't get to bed, I'll drop to sleep on the hearth-rug."

"Then go, dear," she answered, and not until I reached the landing above did I realise that through it all she had not put a single question to me. With the realisation I knew that I ought to have told her what in her heart she must have felt it to be her right to know; but a nervous shrinking, which seemed to be a result of my complete physical exhaustion, held me back when I started to retrace my steps.

She might cry, and the sight of tears would unman me. There's time enough, I thought. Why not to-morrow instead? Yet in my heart I knew it would be no easier to do it to-morrow than it was to-day. By some strange freak of the imagination those unshed tears of hers seemed already dropping upon my nerves. "There's time enough, she'll be obliged to hear it in the end," something within me repeated with a kind of dulness. And with the words, while my head touched the pillow, I started suddenly wide awake as though from the flash of a lantern that was turned inward. Trivial impressions of the afternoon stood out as if illuminated against the outer darkness, and there hovered before me the face of the old woman, in the plaid shawl, with her twisted mouth, and the foot of her grey yarn stocking held out in her palsied hand. "I reckon I'd feel easier if I had it back," said a voice somewhere in my brain.

CHAPTER XXV

WE FACE THE FACTS AND EACH OTHER

The panic which had begun with the depositors of small accounts, spread next day to the holders of larger ones, and even while I stood at my window and watched the cash brought in in bags through the cheering crowd on the sidewalk, I knew that the quarter of a million dollars would go down with the rest. My financial insight had misled me, and the bank funds, which I had believed so carefully guarded, had suffered the same fate as my private fortune. There were more serious questions behind the immediate need of currency, and these questions drummed in my mind now, dull and regular as the beat of a hammer.

For three days we paid off our accounts, and at the end of that time, when I left the building, after the run had stopped, it seemed to me that the city had a deserted and trampled look, as if some enormous picnic had been held in the streets. A few loose shreds of paper, a banana peel here and there, the ends of numerous cigars, and the white patch torn from a woman's petticoat littered the pavement. Over all there was a thick coating of dust, and the wind, blowing straight from the east, whipped swirls of it into our faces, as the General and I drove slowly up-town in his buggy.

"You look down in the mouth, Ben," he remarked, as I took the reins.

"I've got an infernal toothache, General; it kept me awake all night."

"Well, bless my soul, you ought to be thankful if it takes your mind off the country. I haven't seen such a state of affairs since the days of reconstruction. I tell you, my boy, the only thing on earth to do is to take a julep. Lithia water is well enough in times of prosperity, but you can't support a panic on it. I've gone back to my julep, and if I die of it, I'll die with a little spirit in me."

"There're worse things than death ahead of me, General, there's ruin."

"It's the toothache, Ben. Don't let it take all the spirit out of you."

"No, it's more than the toothache, confound it! — it never leaves off. The truth is, I'm in the tightest place of my life, and to keep what I own would cost me more than I've got. I haven't the money to pay up — and if I can't buy outright, you see that I must let go."

"I've done what I could for you, Ben, and if there is more I can do, heaven knows I'll be thankful enough."

"You've already done too much, General, but I've made sure that you shan't suffer by it. I've simply gone down, that's all, and I've got to stay there till I can get on my feet. The bank will close temporarily, I suppose, but when it starts again, it will have to start with another man. I shall look out for a smaller job."

"If you come back to the road, I'll find a place for you — but it won't be like being a bank president, you know."

"Well, when the time comes, I'll let you know," I added, when the buggy stopped before my door, and I handed him the reins.

"Listen to me, my boy," he called back, as he drove off and I went up the brown stone steps, "and take a julep."

But the support I needed was not that of whiskey, and though I swallowed a dozen juleps, the thought of Sally's face when I broke the news would suffer no blessed obscurity.

"Shall I tell her now, or after dinner?" I asked, while I drew out my latch-key; and then when she met me at the head of the staircase, with her shining eyes, I grew cowardly again, and said, "Not now — not now. To-night I will tell her."

At night, when we sat opposite to each other, with a silver bowl of jonquils between us, she began talking idly about the marriage of Bonny Page, inspired, I felt, by a valiant determination to save the situation in the eyes of the servants at least. The small yellow candle shades, made to resemble flowers, shone like suns in a mist before my eyes; and all the time that my thoughts worked over the approaching hour, I heard, like a muffled undertone, the soft, regular footfalls of old Esdras, the butler, on the velvet carpet.

"I'll tell her after the servants have gone, and the house is quiet — when she has taken off her dinner gown — when she may turn on her pillow and cry it out. I'll say simply, 'Sally, I am ruined. I haven't a penny left of my own. Even the horses and the carriages and the furniture are not mine!' No, that is a brutal way. It will be better to put it like this —

"What did you say, dear?" I asked, speaking aloud.

"Only that Bonny Page is to have six bridesmaids, but the wedding will be quiet, because they have lost money."

"They've lost money?"

"Everybody has lost money — everybody, the General says. Ben, do you know," she added, "I've never cared truly about money in my heart."

In some vague woman's way she meant it, I suppose, yet as I looked at her, where she sat beyond the bowl of jonquils, in one of her old Paris gowns, which she had told me she was wearing out, I broke into a short, mirthless laugh. She held her head high, with its wreath of plaits that made a charming frame for her arched black eyebrows and her full red mouth. On her bare throat, round and white as a marble column, there was an old-fashioned necklace of wrought gold, which had belonged to some ancestress, who was doubtless the belle and beauty of her generation. Was it possible to picture her in a common gown, with her sleeves rolled up and the perplexed and anxious look that poverty brings in her eyes? For the first time in my life I was afraid to face the moment before me.

The roast was removed, the dessert served, and played with in silence. The footfalls of old Esdras, the butler, sounded softer on the carpet, as he carried away the untasted pudding and brought coffee and an apricot brandy, which he placed before me with a persuasive air. I lit a cigar at the flame of the little silver lamp he offered me, drank my coffee hurriedly, and rose from the table.

"Are you going to work, Ben?" asked Sally, following me to the door of the library.

"Yes, I am going to work."

Without a word she raised her lips to mine, and when I had kissed her, she turned slowly away, and went up the staircase, with the branching lights in the hall shining upon her head.

I closed the door, lowered the wick of the oil lamp on my desk, and began walking up and down the length of the room, between the black oak bookcases filled with rows of calf-bound volumes. I tried to think, but between my thoughts and myself there obtruded always, like some small, malignant devil, the face of the old woman on the pavement before the bank, with her distorted and twisted mouth. "This will have to go — everything will have to go — when I've sold every last stick I have in the world, I shall still owe a debt of some cool hundreds of thousands. I'll pay that, too, some day. Of course, of course, but when? Meanwhile, we've got to live somewhere, somehow. There's the child, too — and there's Sally. I always said I'd only money to give her, and now I haven't that. We'll have to go into some cheap place, and I'll begin over again, with the disadvantages of a failure behind me, and a burden of debt on my shoulders. She's got to know — I've got to tell her. Confound that old woman! Why can't I keep her out of my thoughts?"

The hours went by, and still I walked up and down between the black oak bookcases, driven by some demon of torture to follow the same line in the Turkish rug, to turn always at the same point, to measure always the same number of steps.

"Well, she got her money — they all got their money," I said at last. "I am the only one who is ruined — no, not the only one — there is Sally and there is the child. I'd feel easier," I added, echoing the words of the old woman aloud, "I'd feel easier if I were the only one."

A clock somewhere in the city struck the hour of midnight, and while the sound was still in the air, the door opened softly and Sally came into the room. She had slipped on a wrapper over her nightdress, and her hair, flattened and warmed by the pillow, hung in a single braid over her bosom. There were deep circles under her eyes, which shone the more brilliantly because of the heavy shadows.

"What is the matter, Ben? Why don't you come upstairs?"

"I couldn't sleep — I am thinking," I answered, almost roughly, oppressed by my weight of misery.

"Would you rather be alone? Shall I go away again?"

"Yes, I'd rather be alone."

She went silently to the door, stood there a minute, and then ran back with her arms outstretched.

"Oh, Ben, Ben, why are you so hard? Why are you so cruel?"

"Cruel? Hard? To you, Sally?"

"You treat me as if — as if I'd married you for your money and you've made me hate and despise it. I wish — I almost wish we hadn't a penny."

I laughed the bitter, mirthless laugh that had broken from me at dinner.

"As a matter of fact we haven't — not a single penny that we can honestly call our own."

She drew back instantly, her head held high under the branching electric jet in the ceiling.

"Well, I'm glad of it," she responded defiantly.

"You don't in the least understand what it means, Sally. It isn't merely giving up a few luxuries, it is actually going without the necessities. It is practically beginning again."

"I am glad of it," she repeated, and there was no regret in her voice.

"Oh, can't you understand?"

"Tell me and I will try."

"I've lost everything. I'm ruined."

"There is nothing left?"

"There is honour," I said bitterly, "a couple of hundred thousand dollars of debt, and a little West Virginia railroad too poor to go bankrupt."

"Then we must start from the very bottom?"

"From the very bottom. Nothing that you are likely to imagine can be worse than the facts — and I've brought you to it."

Something that was like a sob burst from me, and turning away, I flung myself into the chair on the hearth-rug.

"Can't you think of anything that would be worse?" she asked quietly.

I shook my head, "The worst thing about it is that I've brought you to it."

"Wouldn't it be worse," she went on in the same level voice, "if you had lost me?"

"Lost you!" I cried, and my arms were open at the thought.

"I'm glad, I'm glad." With the words she was on

her knees at my side, and her mouth touched my cheek. "I knew it wasn't the worst, Ben, — I knew you'd rather give up the money than give up me. Ah, can't you see — can't you see, that the worst can't come to us while we are still together?"

Leaning over her, I gathered her to me with a hunger for comfort, kissing her eyes, her mouth, her throat, and the loosened braid on her bosom.

"Oh, you witch, you've almost made me happy!" I said.

"I am happy, Ben."

"Happy? The horses must go, and the carriage and the furniture even. We'll have to move into some cheap place. I'll get a position of some kind with the railroad, and then we'll have to scrimp and save for an eternity, until we pay off this damned burden of debt."

She laughed softly, her mouth at my ear. "I'm happy, Ben."

"We shan't be able to keep servants. You'll have to wear old clothes, and I'll go so shabby that you'll be ashamed of me. We'll forget what a bottle of wine looks like, and if we were ever to see a decent dinner, we shouldn't recognise it."

Again she laughed, "I'm still happy, Ben."

"We'll live in some God-forsaken, out-of-the-way little hole, and never even dare ask a person in to a meal for fear there wouldn't be enough potatoes to go around. It will be a daily uphill grind until I've managed to pay off honestly every cent I owe."

Her arms tightened about my neck, "Oh, Ben, I'm so happy."

"Then you are a perfectly abandoned creature," I returned, lifting her from the rug until she nestled against my heart. "I've given up trying to make you as miserable as a self-respecting female ought to be. If you won't be proper and wretched, I can't help it, for I've done my best. And the most ridiculous part of it is, darling, that I actually believe I'm happy, too!"

She laughed like a child between her kisses. "Then, you see, it isn't really the thing, but the way you take it that matters."

"I'm not sure about the logic of that—but I'm inclined to think just now that the only thing I've ever taken is you."

"If you'll try to remember that, you'll be always happy."

"But I must remember also that I've brought you to poverty — I, who had only money to give you."

"Do you dare to tell me to my face that I married you for money?"

"You couldn't very well have married me without it."

"I don't know about the 'very well,' but I know that I'd have done it."

"Do you think that, Sally?"

Turning in my arms, she lifted her head, and looked steadily into my face.

"Have I ever lied to you since we were married, Ben?"

"No, darling."

"Have I ever deceived you?"

"Never, I am sure," I responded with a desperate levity, "except for my good."

"Have I ever deceived you," she demanded sternly, "even for your good?"

"To tell the truth, I don't believe you ever have."

The warm pressure of her body was withdrawn, and rising to her feet, she stood before me under the blazing light.

"Then I'm not lying to you when I say that I'd have married you if you hadn't possessed a penny to your name — I'd have married you if — if I'd had to take in washing."

"Sally!" I cried, and made a movement to recapture her; but pushing me back, she stood straight and tall, with the fingers of her outstretched hand touching my breast.

"No, listen to me, listen to me," she said gravely. "As long as I have you and you love me, Ben, nothing can break my spirit, because the thing that makes life of value to me will still be mine. If you ever ceased to love me, I might get desperate, and do something wild and foolish — even run off with another man, I believe — I don't know, but I am my father's daughter, as well as my mother's. Until that time comes, I can bear anything, and bear it with courage — with gaiety even. I can imagine myself without everything else, but not without you. I love my child — you know I love my child — but even my child isn't you. If I had to choose to-night between my baby and you, I'd give him up, — and cling the closer to you. You are myself, and if I had to choose between everything else I've ever known in my life and you, I'd let everything else go and follow you anywhere — anywhere. There is nothing that you can endure that I cannot share with

you. I can bear poverty, I could even have borne shame. If we had to go to some strange country far away from all I have ever known, I could go and go cheerfully. I can work beside you, I can work for you — oh, my dear, my dearest, I am your wife, do you still doubt me?"

I had fallen on my knees before her, with her open palms pressed to my forehead, in which my very brain seemed throbbing. As I looked up at her, she stooped and gathered me to her bosom.

"Do you know me now?" she asked in a whisper.

Then her voice broke, and the next instant she would have sunk down beside me, if I had not sprung to my feet and lifted her in my arms. While I held her thus, pressed close against me, something of her radiant strength entered into me, and I was aware of a power in myself that was neither hers nor mine, but the welding of the finer qualities in both our natures

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RED FLAG AT THE GATE

Sally was not beside me when I awoke in the morning, nor was she sipping her coffee by the window, as I had sometimes found her doing when I slept late. Going downstairs an hour afterwards, I discovered her, for the first time since our marriage, awaiting me in the dining-room. In her dainty breakfast jacket of blue silk, with a bit of lace and ribbon framing her wreath of plaits, she appeared to my tired eyes as the embodied freshness and buoyancy of the morning. Would her sparkling gaiety endure, I wondered, through the monotonous days ahead, when poverty became, not a child's play, not a game tricked out by the imagination, but the sordid actuality of hard work and hourly self-denial?

"I am practising early rising, Ben," she said, "and it's astonishing what an appetite it gives one. I've made the coffee myself, and Aunt Mehitable has just taught me how to make yeast. One can never tell what may come useful, you know, and if we go to live somewhere in a jungle, which I'm quite prepared to do, you'd be glad to know that I could make yeast, wouldn't you?"

"I suppose so, sweetheart, and as a matter of fact," I added presently, "this is the best cup of coffee I've had for many a month."

Laughing merrily, she perched herself on the arm

of my chair, and sipped out of the cup I held toward her. "Of course it is. So you've gained that much by losing everything. It's very strange, Ben, and you may consider it presumptuous, but I've a profound conviction somewhere in the bottom of my heart that I can do everything better than anybody else, if I once turn my hand to it. At this minute I haven't a doubt that my yeast is better than Aunt Mehitable's. I'm going to cook dinner, too, and she'll be positively jealous of my performance. How do we know whether or not we'll meet any cooks in the jungle? And if we do, they'll probably be tigers —"

"Oh, Sally, Sally! You think it play now, but what will you feel when you know it's earnest?"

"Of course it's earnest. Do you imagine I'd get out of my bed at seven o'clock and cut up a slimy potato if it wasn't earnest? That may be your idea of play, but it's not mine."

"And you expect to flutter about a stove in a pale blue breakfast jacket and a lace cap?"

"Just as long as they last. When they go, I suppose I'll have to take to calico, but it will be pretty calico, and pink. Pink calico don't cost a penny more than drab — and there's one thing I positively decline to do, even in a jungle, and that is look ugly."

"You couldn't if you tried, my beauty."

"Oh, yes, I could — I could look hideous — any woman could if she tried. But as long as it doesn't cost any more, you've no objection to my cooking in pink instead of drab, I suppose?"

"I've an objection to your cooking in anything. Another cup of coffee, please."

"Ben."

"Yes, dear."

"You never drank but one of Aunt Mehitable's."

"I'm aware of it, and I'm aware of something else. It's worth being poor, Sally, to be poor with you."

"Then give me another taste of your coffee. But you don't call this being poor, do you, you silly boy? — with all this beautiful mahogany that I can use for a mirror? This isn't any fun in the world. Just wait until I spread the cloth over a pine table. Then we'll have something to laugh at sure enough, Ben."

"And I thought you'd cry!"

"You thought a great many very foolish things, my dear. You even thought I'd married you because I wanted to be rich, and it seemed an easy way."

"Only it turned out to be an easier way of getting poor."

"Well, rich or poor, what I married you for, after all, was the essential thing."

"And you've got it, sweetheart?"

"Of course I've got it. If I didn't have it, do you think I'd be able to laugh at a pine table?"

"If I were only sure you realised it!"

"You'll be sure enough when we are in the midst of it, and we'll be in the midst of it, I don't doubt, in a little while. I've been thinking pretty hard since last night, and this is what I worked out while I was making yeast."

"Let's have it, then."

"Now, the first thing we've got to do is to get out of debt, isn't it?"

"The very first thing, if it can be managed."

"We'll manage it this way. The furniture and the silver and my jewels must all be sold, of course; that's easy. But even after we've done that, there'll still be a great big burden to carry, I suppose?"

"Pretty big, I'm afraid, for your shoulders."

"Oh, we'll pay it every bit in the end. We won't go bankrupt. You'll go back to the railroad on a salary, and we'll begin to pinch on the spot."

"Yes, but times are hard and salaries are low."

"Anyway they're salaries, there's that much to be said for them. And while we're pinching as hard as we can pinch, we'll move over to Church Hill and rent two or three rooms in the old house with the enchanted garden. All the servants will have to go except Aunt Euphronasia, who couldn't go very far, poor thing, because she's rheumatic and can't stand on her feet. She can sit still very well, however, and rock the baby, and I'll look after the rooms and get the meals — I'm glad they'll be simple ones — and we'll put by every penny that we can save."

"The mere interest on the debt will take almost as much as we can save. There'll be some arrangement made, of course, and the payments will be easy, but there's one thing I'm determined on, and that is that I'll pay it, every cent, if I live. Then, too, there's chance, you know. Something may turn up — something almost always turns up to a man like myself."

"Well, if it turns up, we'll welcome it with open arms. But in the meantime we'll see if we can't scrape along without it. I'm going over this morning to look

for rooms. How soon, Ben, do you suppose they will evict us?"

"Does there exist a woman," I demanded sternly, "who can be humorous over her own eviction?"

"It's better to be humorous over one's own than over one's neighbour's, isn't it? And besides, a laugh may help things, but tears never do. I was born laughing, mamma always said."

"Then laugh on, sweetheart."

I had risen from the table, and was moving toward the door, when she caught my arm.

"There's only one thing I'll never, never consent to," she said, "you remember Dolly?"

"Your old mare?"

"I've pensioned her, you know, and I'll pay that pension as long as she lives if we both have to starve."

"You shall do it if we're hanged and drawn for it — and now, Sally, I must be off to my troubles!"

"Then, good-by and be brave. Oh, Ben, my dearest, what is the matter?"

"It's my head. I've been worrying too much, and it's gone back on me like that twice in the last few days."

I went out hurriedly, convinced that even failure wasn't quite so bad as it had appeared from a distance; and Sally, following me to the door, stood smiling after me as I went down the block toward the car line. Looking back at the corner, I saw that she was still standing on the threshold, with the sun in her eyes and her head held high under the ruffle of lace and ribbon that framed her hair.

The street was filled with people that morning, and at the end of the first block Bonny Page nodded to

me jauntily, as she passed on her early ride with Ned Marshall. Turning, almost unconsciously, my eyes followed her graceful, very erect figure, in its close black habit, swaying so perfectly with the motion of her chestnut mare. An immeasurable, wind-blown space seemed to stretch between us, and the very sound of the horse's hoofs on the cobblestones in the street came to me, faint and thin, as if it had floated back from some remote past which I but dimly remembered. I had never felt, even when standing at Bonny's side, that I was within speaking distance of her, and to-day, while I looked after the vanishing horses, I knew that odd, baffling sensation of struggling to break through an inflexible, yet invisible barrier. Why was it that I who had won Sally should still remain so hopelessly divided from all that to which Sally by right and by nature belonged?

Farther down the two great sycamores, still gaunt and bare as skeletons, stood out against a sky of intense blueness; and on the crooked pavement beneath, the shadows, fine and delicate as lace-work, rippled gently in the wind that blew straight in from the river. Looking up from under the silvery boughs, I saw the wire cage of the canary between the parted curtains, and beyond it the pale oval face of Miss Mitty, with its grave, set smile, so like the smile of the painted Blands and Fairfaxes that hung, in massive frames, on the drawing-room walls. In the midst of my own ruin an impulse of compassion entered my heart. The vacancy of the old grey house was like the vacancy of a tomb in which the ashes have scattered, and the one living spirit seemed that of the canary singing joy-

ously in his wire cage. Something in the song brought Sally to my mind as she had appeared that morning at breakfast, and I felt again the soft, comforting touch of the hand she had laid on my face. Then I turned my eyes to the street, and saw George Bolingbroke coming slowly toward me, beyond the last great sycamore, which grew midway of the bricks. At the sight of him all that had comforted or supported me crumbled and fell. In its place came that sharp physical soreness — like the soreness from violent action — that the shock of my failure had brought. I, who had meant so passionately to win in the race, was suddenly crippled. Money, I had said, was all that I had to give, and yet I was beggared now even of that. Shorn of my power, what remained to me that would make me his match?

He came up, taking his cigar from his mouth as he stopped, and flicking the ashes away, while he stood looking at me with an expression of sympathy which he struggled in vain, I saw, to dissemble. On his finely coloured, though rather impassive features, there was the same darkening of a carefully suppressed emotion — the same lines of anger drawn, not by temper, but by suffering — that I had seen first at the club when his favourite hunter had died, and next on the day when the General had spoken to him, in my presence, of my engagement to Sally. Under his short dark mustache, his thin, nervous lips were set closely together.

"I'm awfully cut up, Ben," he said, "I declare I don't know when I was ever so cut up about anything before."

"I'm cut up too, George, like the deuce, but it doesn't appear to help matters, somehow."

"That's the worst thing about being a man of affairs like you — or like Uncle George," he observed, making an amiable effort to assure me that even in the hour of adversity, I still held my coveted place in the General's class; "when the crash comes, you big ones have to pay the piper, while the rest of us small fry manage to go scot-free."

It was put laboriously, but beneath the words I felt the force of that painful sympathy, too strong for concealment, and yet not strong enough to break through the inherited habit of self-command. The General had broken through, I acknowledged, but then was not the very greatness of the great man the expression of an erratic departure from traditions rather than of the perfect adherence to the racial type?

"And the louder the music the bigger the cost of the piper," I observed, with a laugh.

"Oh, you'll come out all right," he rejoined cheerfully, "things are never so bad as they might be."

"Well, I don't know that there's much comfort in reflecting that a thunder-storm might have been accompanied by an earthquake."

For a moment he stood in silence watching the end of his cigar, which went out in his hand. Then without meeting my eyes he asked in a voice that had a curiously muffled sound: —

"It's rough on Sally, isn't it? How does she stand it?"

"As she stands everything — like an angel out of heaven."

"Yes, you're right — she is an angel," he returned, still without looking into my face. An instant later, as if in response to an impulse which for once rose superior to the dead weight of custom, he blurted out with a kind of suffering violence, "I say, Ben, you know it's really awful. I'm so cut up about it I don't know what to do. I wish you'd let me help you out of this hole till you're on your feet. I've got nobody on me, you see, and I can't spend half of my income."

For the first time in our long acquaintance the tables were turned; it was George who was awkward now, and I who was perfectly at my ease.

"I can't do that, George," I said quietly, "but I'm grateful to you all the same. You're a first-rate chap."

We shook hands with a grip, and while he still lingered to strike a match and light the fresh cigar he had taken from his case, the little yellow flame followed, like an illuminated pointer, the expression of suffering violence which showed so strangely upon his face. Then, tossing the match into the gutter, he went on his way, while I passed the great scarred body of the sycamore and hurried down the long hill, which I never descended without recalling, as the General had said, that I had once "toted potatoes for John Chitling."

At the beginning of the next block, I saw the miniature box hedge and the clipped yew in the little garden of Dr. Theophilus, and as I turned down the side street, the face of the old man looked at me from the midst of some leafless red currant bushes that grew in clumps at the end of the walk.

"Come in, Ben, come in a minute," he called, beam-

ing at me over his lowered spectacles, "there's a thing or two I should like to say."

As I entered the garden and walked along the tiny path, bordered by oyster shells, to the red currant bushes beyond, he laid his pruning-knife on the ground, and sat down on an old bench beside a little green table, on which a sparrow was hopping about. On his seventy-fifth birthday he had resigned his profession to take to gardening, and I had heard from no less an authority than the General that "that old fool Theophilus was spending more money in roses than Mrs. Clay was making out of pickles."

"What is it, doctor?" I asked, for, oppressed by my own burdens, I waited a little impatiently to hear "the thing or two" he wanted to say.

"You see I've given up people, Ben, and taken to roses," he began, while I stood grinding my heel into the gravelled walk; "and it's a good change, too, when you come to my years, there's no doubt of that. If you weed and water them and plant an occasional onion about their roots you can make roses what you want — but you can't people — no, not even when you've helped to bring them into the world. No matter how straight they come at birth, they're all just as liable as not to take an inward crank and go crooked before the end." He looked thoughtfully at the sparrow hopping about on the green table, and his face, beautiful with the wisdom of more than seventy years, was illumined by a smile which seemed in some way a part of the April sunshine flooding the clumps of red currant bushes and the miniature box. "George — I mean old George — was telling me about you

Ben," he went on after a minute, "and as soon as I heard of your troubles, I said to Tina — 'We've got a roof and we've got a bite, so they'll come to us.' What with Tina's pickling and preserving we manage to keep a home, my boy, and you're more than welcome to share it with us — you and Sally and your little Benjamin —"

"Doctor — doctor —" was all I could say, for words failed me, and I, also, stood looking thoughtfully at the sparrow hopping about on the green table, with eyes that saw two small brown feathered bodies in the place where, a minute before, there had been but one.

"Come when you're ready, come when you're ready," he repeated, "and we'll make you welcome, Tina and I."

I grasped his hand without speaking, and as I wrung it in my own, I felt that it was long and fine and nervous, — the hand, not of a worker, but of a dreamer. Then tearing my gaze from the sparrow, I went back through the clump of red currant bushes, and between the shining rows of oyster shells, to the busy street which led to a busy world and my office door.

A fortnight later the house was sold over our heads, and when I came up in the afternoon, I found a red flag flying at the gate, and the dusty buggies of a few real estate men tied to the young maples on the sidewalk. Upstairs Sally was sitting on a couch, in the midst of the scattered furniture, while George Bolingbroke stood looking ruefully at a pile of silver and bric-a-brac that filled the centre of the floor.

"Are you laughing now, Sally?" I asked desperately, as I entered.

"Not just this minute, dear, because that awful man and a crowd of people have been going over the house, and Aunt Euphronasia and I locked ourselves in the nursery. I'll begin again, however, as soon as they've gone. All these things belong to George. It was silly of him to buy them, but he says he had no idea of allowing them to go to strangers."

"Well, George as well as anybody, I suppose," I responded, moodily.

Beside the window Aunt Euphronasia was rocking slowly back and forth, with little Benjamin fast asleep on her knees, and her great rolling eyes, rimmed with white, passed from me to George and from George to me with a defiant and angry look.

"I ain' seen nuttin' like dese yer doin's sence war time," she grumbled; "en hit's wuss den war time, caze war time hit's fur all, en dish yer hit ain't fur nobody cep'n us."

Throwing herself back on the pillow, Sally lay for a minute with her hand over her eyes.

"I can laugh now," she said at last, raising her head, and she, also, as she sat there, pale and weary but bravely smiling, glanced from me to George with a perplexed, inscrutable look. A minute later, when George made some pleasant, comforting remark and went down to join the crowd gathered before the door, her gaze still followed him, a little pensively, as he left the room. The bruise throbbed again; and walking to the window, I stood looking through the partly closed blinds to the street below, where I could see the dusty buggies, the switching tails of the horses, bothered by flies, and the group of real estate men, lounging,

while they spat tobacco juice, by the red flag at the gate. In the warm air, which was heavy with the scent of a purple catalpa tree on the corner, the drawling voice of the auctioneer could be heard like the loud droning of innumerable bees. A carriage passed down the street in a cloud of dust, and the very dust, as it drifted toward us, was drenched with the heady perfume of the catalpa.

"That tree makes me dizzy," I said; "it's odd I never minded it before."

"You aren't well — that's the trouble — but even if you were, the voice of that man down there is enough to drive any sane person crazy. He sounds exactly as if he were intoning a church service over our misfortunes. That is certainly adding horror to humiliation," she finished with merriment.

"At any rate he doesn't humiliate you?"

"Of course he doesn't. Imagine one of the Blands and the Fairfaxes being humiliated by an auctioneer! He amuses me, even though it is our woes he is singing about. If I were Aunt Mitty, I'd probably be seated on the front porch with my embroidery at this minute, bowing calmly to the passers-by, as if it were the most matter-of-fact occurrence in the world to have an auctioneer selling one's house over one's head."

"Dear old enemy, I wonder what she thinks of this?"

"She hasn't heard it, probably. A newspaper never enters her doors, and do you believe she has a relative who would be reckless enough to break it to her?"

"I hope she hasn't, anyhow."

"They haven't had time to go to her. They have all been here. People have been coming all day with offers of help — even Jessy's Mr. Cottrel — and oh, Ben, she told me she meant to marry him! Bonny Page," a little sob broke from her, "Bonny Page wanted to give up her trip to Europe and have me take the money. Then everybody's been sending me luncheons and jellies and things just exactly as if I were an invalid."

"Hit's de way dey does in war time, honey," remarked Aunt Euphronasia, shaking little Benjamin with the slow, cradling movement of the arms known only to the negroes.

Downstairs the auction was over, the drawling nonologue was succeeded by a babel of voices, and glancing through the blinds, I saw the real estate men untying their horses from the young maples. A swirl of dust laden with the scent of the catalpa blew up from the street.

"But we can't take help, Sally," I said, almost fiercely.

"No, we can't take help, I told them so — I told them that we didn't need it. In a few years we'd be back where we were, I said, and I believed it."

"Do you believe it after listening to that confounded fog-horn on the porch?"

"Well, it's a trial to faith, as Aunt Mitty would say, but, oh, Ben, I really *do* believe it still."

CHAPTER XXVII

WE CLOSE THE DOOR BEHIND US

It was a warm spring afternoon when we closed the door behind us for the last time, and took the car for Church Hill, where we had rented several rooms on the first floor of the house with the enchanted garden. As the car descended into the neighbourhood of the Old Market, with its tightly packed barrooms, its squalid junk shops, its strings of old clothes waving before darkened, ill-smelling doorways, I seemed to have stepped suddenly backward into a place that was divided between the dream and the actuality. I remembered my awakening on the pile of straw, with the face of John Chitling beaming down on me over the wheelbarrow of vegetables; and the incidents of that morning — the long line of stalls giving out brilliant flashes from turnips and onions, the sharp, fishy odour from the strings of mackerel and perch, the very blood-stains on the apron and rolled-up sleeves of the butcher — all these things were more vivid to my consciousness than were the faces of Sally and of Aunt Euphronasia, or the fretful cries of little Benjamin, swathed in a blue veil, in the old negress's lap. I had meant to make good that morning, when I had knelt there sorting the yellow apples. I had made good for a time, and yet to-day I was back in the place from which I had started. Well, not in the same place, perhaps, but my foot had

slipped on the ladder, and I must begin again, if not from the very bottom, at least from the middle rung. The market wagons, covered with canvas, were still standing with empty shafts in the littered street, as if they had waited there, a shelter for prowling dogs, until my return. Mrs. Chitling's slovenly doorstep I could not see, but as we ascended the long hill on the other side, I recognised the musty "old clothes" shop, in which I had stumbled on "Sir Charles Grandison" and Johnson's Dictionary. That minute, I understood now, had been in reality the turning-point in my career. In that close-smelling room I had come to the cross-roads of success or failure, and swerving aside from the dull level of ignorance, I had rushed, almost by accident, into the better way. The very odour of the place was still in my nostrils — a mixture of old clothes, of stale cheese, of overripe melons. A sudden dizziness seized me, and a wave of physical nausea passed over me, as if the intense heat of that past summer afternoon had gone to my head.

The car stopped at the corner of old Saint John's; we got out, assisting Aunt Euphronasia, and then turned down a side street in the direction of our new home. As we mounted the curving steps, Sally passed a little ahead of me, and looked back with her hand on the door.

"I am happy, Ben," she said with a smile; and with the words on her lips, she crossed the threshold and entered the wide hall, where the moth-eaten stags' heads, worn bare of fur, still hung on the faded plaster.

My first impression upon entering the room was that the strange surroundings struck with a homelike and

familiar aspect upon my consciousness. Then, as bewilderment gave place before a closer scrutiny, I saw that this aspect was due to the presence of the objects by which I had been so long accustomed to see Sally surrounded. Her amber satin curtains hung at the windows; the deep couch, with the amber lining, upon which she rested before dressing for dinner, stood near the hearth; and even the two crystal vases, which I had always seen holding fresh flowers upon her small, inlaid writing desk, were filled now with branching clusters of American Beauty roses. Beyond them, and beyond the amber satin curtains at the long window, I saw the elm boughs arching against a pale gold sunset into which a single swallow was flying. And I remember that swallow as I remember the look, swift, expectant, as if it, also, were flying, that trembled, for an instant, on Sally's face.

"It is George," she said, turning to me with radiant eyes; "George has done this. These are the things he bought, and I wondered so what he would do with them." Then before something in my face, the radiance died out of her eyes. "Would you rather he didn't do it? Would you rather I shouldn't keep them?" she asked.

A struggle began within me. Through the window I could see still the pale gold sunset beyond the elms, but the swallow was gone, and gone, also, from Sally's face was the look as of one flying.

"Would you rather that I shouldn't keep them?" she asked again, and her voice was very gentle.

At that gentleness the struggle ceased as sharply as it had begun.

"Do as you choose, darling, you know far better than I," I replied; and bending over her, I raised her chin that was lowered, and kissed her lips.

A light, a bloom, something that was fragrant and soft as the colour and scent of the American Beauty roses, broke over her as she looked up at me with her mouth still opening under my kiss.

"Then I'll keep them," she answered, "because it would hurt him so, Ben, if I sent them back."

The colour and bloom were still there, but in my heart a chill had entered to drive out the warmth. My ruin, my failure, the poverty to which I had brought Sally and the child through my inordinate ambition, and the weight of the two hundred thousand dollars of debt on my shoulders — all these things returned to my memory, with an additional heaviness, like a burden that has been lifted only to drop back more crushingly. And as always in my thoughts now, this sense of my failure came to me in the image of George Bolingbroke, with his air of generous self-sufficiency, as if he needed nothing because he had been born to the possession of all necessary things.

Sally drew the long pins from her hat, laid them, with the floating white veil and her coat, on a chair in one corner, and began to move softly about in her restful, capable way. Her very presence, I had once said of her, would make a home, and I remembered this a little later as I watched the shadow of her head flit across the faded walls above the fine old wainscoting, from which the white paint was peeling in places. Her touch, swift and unfaltering, released some spirit of beauty and cheerfulness which must have lain im-

prisoned for a generation in the superb old rooms. On the floor with us there were no other tenants, but when I heard an occasional sound in the room above, I remembered that the agent had told me of an aristocratic, though poverty-stricken, maiden lady, who was starving up there in the midst of some rare pieces of old Chippendale furniture, and with the portrait of an English ancestress by Gainsborough hanging above her fireless hearth.

"The baby is asleep, so Aunt Euphronasia and I are cooking supper," said Sally, when she had spread the cloth over the little table, and laid covers for two on either side of the shaded lamp; "at least she's cooking and I'm serving. Come into the garden, Ben, before it's ready, and run with me down the terrace."

"The garden is ruined. I saw it when I came over with the agent."

"Ruined? And with such lilacs! They are a little late because of the cold spring, but a perfect bower."

She caught my hand as she spoke, and we passed together through the long window leading from our bedroom to the porch, where a few startled swallows flew out, crying harshly, from among the white columns. Many of the elms had died; the magnolias and laburnums, with the exception of a few stately trees, had decayed on the terrace, and the thick maze of box was now thin and rapidly dwindling away from the gravelled paths. On the ground, under the young green of dandelion and wild violets, the rotting leaves of last year were still lying; and as we descended the steps, and followed the littered walks down the hillside, broken pieces of pottery crumbled beneath our feet.

Clasping hands like two children, we stood for a minute in silence, with our eyes on the ruin before us, and the memory of the enchanted garden and our first love in our thoughts. Then, "Oh, Ben, the lilacs!" said Sally, softly.

They were there on all sides, floating like purple and white clouds in the wind, and shedding their delicious perfume over the scattered rose arbours and the dwindling box. Light, delicate, and brave, they had withstood frost and decay, while the latticed summer houses had fallen under the weight of the microphylla roses that grew over them. The wind now was laden with their sweetness, and the golden light seemed aware of their colour as it entered the garden softly through the screen of boughs.

"Do you remember the first day, Ben?"

"The first day? That was when President lifted me on the wall — and even the wall has gone."

"Did you dream then that you'd ever stand here with me like this?"

"I dreamed nothing else. I've never dreamed anything else."

"Then you aren't so very unhappy as long as we are together?"

"Not so unhappy as I might be, but, remember, I'm a man, Sally, and I have failed."

"Yes, you're a man, and you couldn't be happy even with me — without something else."

"The something else is a part of you. It belongs to you, and that's mostly why I want to make good. These debts are like a dead weight — like the Old Man of the Sea — on my shoulders. Until I'm able to shake them off, I shall not stand up straight."

"I'm glad you've gone back to the railroad."

"There are a lot of men in the railroad, and very few places. The General found me this job at six thousand a year, which is precious little for a man of my earning capacity. They'll probably want to send me down South to build up the traffic on the Tennessee and Carolina, — I don't know. It will take me a month anyway to wind up my affairs and start back with the road. Oh, it's going to be a long, hard pull when it once begins."

Pressing her cheek to my arm, she rubbed it softly up and down with a gentle caress. "Well, we'll pull it, never fear," she responded.

At our feet the twilight rose slowly from the sunken terrace, and the perfume of the lilacs seemed to grow stronger as the light faded. For a moment we stood drawn close together; then turning, with my arm still about her, we went back over the broken pieces of pottery, and ascending the steps, left the pearly afterglow and the fragrant stillness behind us.

Half an hour later, when we were in the midst of our supper, which she had served with gaiety and I had eaten with sadness, a hesitating knock came at the door leading into the dim hall, and opening it with surprise, I was confronted by a small, barefooted urchin, who stood, like the resurrected image of my own childhood, holding a covered dish at arm's length before him.

"If you please, ma'am," he said, under my shoulder, to Sally, who was standing behind me, "ma's jest heard you'd moved over here, an' she's sent you some waffles for supper."

"And what may ma's name be?" enquired Sally

politely, as she removed the red and white napkin which covered the gift.

"Ma's Mrs. Titterbury, an' she lives jest over yonder. She says she's been a-lookin' out for you an' she hopes you've come to stay."

"That's very kind of her, and I'm much obliged. Tell her to come to see me."

"She's a-comin', ma'am," he responded cheerfully, and as he withdrew, his place was immediately filled by a little girl in a crimson calico, with two very tight and very slender braids hanging down to her waist in the back.

"Ma's been makin' jelly an' syllabub, an' she thought you might like a taste," she said, offering a glass dish. "Her name is Mrs. Barley, an' she lives around the corner."

"These are evidently our poorer neighbours," observed Sally, as the door closed after the crimson calico and the slender braids; "where are the well-to-do ones that live in all the big houses around us?"

"It probably never occurred to them that we might want a supper. It's the poor who have imagination. By Jove! there's another!"

This time it was a stout, elderly female in rusty black, with a very red face, whom, after some frantic groping of memory, I recognised as Mrs. Cudlip, unaltered apparently by her thirty years of widowhood.

"I jest heard you'd moved back over here, Benjy," she remarked, and at the words and the voice, I seemed to shrink again into the small, half-scared figure clad in a pair of shapeless breeches which were made out of an old dolman my mother had once worn to funerals,

"an' I thought as you might like a taste of muffins made arter the old receipt of yo' po' ma's — the very same kind of muffins she sent me by you on the mornin' arter I buried my man."

Placing the dish upon the table, she seated herself, in response to an invitation from Sally, and spread her rusty black skirt, with a leisurely movement, over her comfortable lap. As I looked at her, I forgot that I stood six feet two inches in my stockings; I forgot that I had married a descendant of the Blands and the Fairfaxes; and I remembered as plainly as if it were yesterday, the morning of the funeral, when, with my mother's grey blanket shawl pinned on my shoulders, I had sat on the step outside and waited for the service to end, while I made scornful faces at the merry driver of the hearse.

"It's been going on thirty years sence yo' ma died, ain't it, Benjy?" she enquired, while I struggled vainly to recover a proper consciousness of my size and my importance.

"I was a little chap at the time, Mrs. Cudlip," I returned.

"An' it's been twenty, I reckon," she pursued reminiscently, "sence yo' pa was took. Wall, wall, time does fly when you come to think of deaths, now, doesn't it? I al'ays said thar wa'nt nothin' so calculated to put cheer an' spirit into you as jest to remember the people who've dropped off an' died while you've been spared. You didn't see much of yo' pa durin' his last days, did you?"

"Never after I ran away, and that was the night he brought his second wife home."

"He had a hard time toward the end, but I reckon she had a harder. It wa'nt that he was a bad man at bottom, but he was soft-natured an' easy, an' what he needed was to be helt an' to be helt steady. Some men air like that — they can't stand alone a minute without beginnin' to wobble. Now as long as yo' ma lived, she kept a tight hand on yo' pa, an' he stayed straight; but jest as soon as he was left alone, he began to wobble, an' from wobblin' he took to the bottle, and from the bottle he took to that brass-headed huzzy he married. She was the death of him, Benjy; I ought to know, for I lived next do' to 'em to the day of his burial. As to that, anyway, ma'am," she added to Sally, "my humble opinion is that women have killed mo' men anyway than they've ever brought into the world. It's a po' thought, I've al'ays said, in which you can't find some comfort."

"You were very kind to him, I have heard," I observed, as she paused for breath and turned toward me.

"It wa'nt mo'n my duty if I was, Benjy, for yo' ma was a real good neighbour to me, an' many's the plate of buttered muffins you've brought to my do' when you wa'nt any higher than that."

It was true, I admitted the fact as gracefully as I could.

"My mother thought a great deal of you," I remarked.

"You don't see many of her like now," she returned with a sigh, "the mo's the pity. 'Thar ain't room for two in marriage,' she used to say, 'one of 'em has got to git an' I'd rather 'twould be the other!' 'Twa'nt that way with the palaverin' yaller-headed piece that

yo' pa married arterwards. She'd a sharp enough tongue, but a tongue don't do you much good with a man unless he knows you've got the backbone behind to drive it. It ain't the tongue, but the backbone that counts in marriage. At first he was mighty soft, but befo' two weeks was up he'd begun to beat her, an' I ain't got a particle of respect for a woman that's once been beaten. Men air born mean, I know, it's thar natur, an' the good Lord intended it; but, all the same, it's my belief that mighty few women come in for a downright beatin' unless they've bent thar backs to welcome it. It takes two to make a beatin' the same as a courtin', an' whar the back ain't ready, the blows air slow to fall."

"I never saw her but once, and then I ran away," I remarked to fill in her pause.

"Wall, you didn't miss much, or you either, ma'am," she rejoined politely; "she was the kind that makes an honest woman ashamed to belong to a sex that's got to thrive through foolishness, an' to git to a place by sidlin' backwards. That wa'nt yo' ma's way, Benjy, an' I've often said that I don't believe she ever hung back in her life an' waited for a man to hand her what she could walk right up an' take holt of without his help. 'The woman that waits on a man has got a long wait ahead of her,' was what she used to say."

Rising to her feet, she stood with the empty plate in her hand, and her back ceremoniously bent in a parting bow.

"Is that yo' youngest? Now, ain't he a fine baby!" she burst out, as little Benjamin appeared, crowing,

in the arms of Aunt Euphronasia, "an he's got all the soft, pleasant look of yo' po' pa a'ready."

I opened the door, and with a last effusive good-by, she passed out in her stiff, rustling black, which looked as if she had gone into perpetual mourning.

"Will you have some syllabub, Ben?" enquired Sally primly, as the door closed.

"Sally, how will you stand it?"

"She wants to be kind — she really wants to be."

Crossing moodily to the table, I pushed aside the waffles, the muffins, and the syllabub, with an angry gesture.

"It is what I came from, after all. It is my class."

"Your class?" she repeated, laughing and sobbing together with her arms on my shoulders. "There's nobody else in the whole world in your class, Ben."

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN WHICH SALLY STOOPS

A WEEK or two later the General stopped me as I was leaving his office.

"I don't like the look of you, Ben. What's the matter?"

"My head has been troubling me, General. It's been splitting for a week, and I can't see straight."

"You've thought too much, that's the mischief. Why not cut the whole thing and go West with me to-morrow in my car? I'll be gone for a month."

"It's out of the question. A man who is over head and ears in debt oughtn't to be spinning about the country in a private car."

"I don't see the logic of that as long as it's somebody else's car."

"You'd see it if you had two hundred thousand dollars of debt."

"Well, I've been worse off. I've had two hundred thousand devils of gout. Here, come along with me. Bring Sally, bring the youngster. I'll take the whole bunch of 'em."

When I declined, he still urged me, showing his annoyance plainly, as a man does in whom opposition even in trifles arouses a resentful, almost a violent, spirit of conquest. So, I knew, he had pursued every aim, great or small, of his life, with the look in his face of an

intelligent bulldog, and the conviction somewhere in his brain that the only method of overcoming an obstacle was to hang on, if necessary, until the obstacle grew too weak to put forth further resistance. Once, and once only, to my knowledge, had this power to hang on, this bulldog grip, availed him but little, and that was when his violence had encountered a gentleness as soft as velvet, yet as inflexible as steel. In his whole life only poor little Miss Matoaca had withstood him; and as I met the angry, indomitable spirit in his eyes, there rose before me the figure of his old love, with her look of meek, unconquerable obstinacy and with the faint fragrance and colour about her that was like the fragrance and colour of faded rose-leaves.

"There's no use, General. I can't do it," I said at last, and parting from him at the corner, I signalled the car for Church Hill, while he drove slowly up-town in his buggy.

It was a breathless June afternoon. A spell of intense early heat had swept over the country, and the summer flowers were unfolding as if forced open in the air of a hothouse. At the door Sally met me with a telegram from Jessy announcing her marriage to Mr. Cottrel in New York; but the words and the fact seemed to me to have no nearer relation to my life than if they had described the romantic adventures of a girl, in a crimson blouse, who was passing along the pavement.

"Well, she's got what she wanted," I remarked indifferently, "so she's to be congratulated, I suppose. My head is throbbing as if it would break open. I'll go in and lie down in the dusk, before supper."

"Do the flowers bother you? Shall I take them away?" she asked, following me into the bedroom, and closing the shutters.

"I don't notice them. This confounded headache is the only thing I can think of. It hasn't let up a single minute."

Bending over me, she laid her cheek to mine, and stroked the hair back from my forehead with her small, cool hand, which reminded me of the touch of roses. Then going softly out, she closed the door after her, while I turned on my side, and lay, half asleep, half awake, in the deepening twilight.

From the garden, through the open blinds of the green shutters, floated the strong, sweet scent of the jessamine blooming on the columns of the piazza; and I heard, now and then, as if from a great distance, the harsh, frightened cry of a swallow as it flew out from its nest under the roof. A sudden, sharp realisation of imperative duties left undone awoke in my mind; and I felt impelled, as if by some outward pressure, to rise and go back again down the long, hot hill into the city. "There's something important I meant to do, and did not," I thought; "as soon as this pain stops, I suppose I shall remember it, and why it is so urgent. If I can only sleep for a few minutes, my brain will clear, and then I can think it out, and everything that is so confused now will be easy." In some way, I knew that this neglected duty concerned Sally and the child. I had been selfish with Sally in my misery. When I awoke with a clear head, I would go to her and say I was sorry.

The scent of the jessamine became suddenly so in-

tense that I drew the coverlet over my face in the effort to shut it out. Then turning my eyes to the wall, I lay without thinking or feeling, while my consciousness slowly drifted outside the closed room and the penetrating fragrance of the garden beyond. Once it seemed to me that somebody came in a dream and bent over me, stroking my forehead. At first I thought it was Sally, until the roughness of the hand startled me, and opening my eyes, I saw that it was my mother, in her faded grey calico, with the perplexed and anxious look in her eyes, as if she, too, were trying to remember some duty which was very important, and which she had half forgotten. "Why, I thought you were dead!" I exclaimed aloud, and the sound of my own voice waked me.

It was broad daylight now; the shutters were open, and the breeze, blowing through the long window, brought the scent of jessamine distilled in the sunshine beyond. It seemed to me that I had slept through an eternity, and with my first waking thought, there revived the same pressure of responsibility, the same sense of duties, unfulfilled and imperative, with which I had turned to the wall and drawn the coverlet over my face. "I must get up," I said aloud; and then, as I lifted my hand, I saw that it was wasted and shrunken, and that the blue veins showed through the flesh as through delicate porcelain. Then, "I've been ill," I thought, and "Sally? Sally?" The effort of memory was too great for me, and without moving my body, I lay looking toward the long window, where Aunt Euphronasia sat, in the square of sunshine, crooning to little Benjamin, while she rocked

slowly back and forth, beating time with her foot to the music.

"Oh, we'll ride in de golden cha'iot. by en bye, lil' chillun,
We'll ride in de golden cha'iot, by en bye.

Oh, we'se all gwine home ter glory, by en bye, lil' chillun,
We'se all gwine home ter glory by en bye.

Oh, we'll drink outer de healin' fountain, by en bye, lil' chillun,
We'll drink outer de healin' fountain by en bye."

"Sally!" I called aloud, and my voice sounded thin and distant in my own ears.

There was the sound of quick steps, the door opened and shut, and Sally came in and leaned over me. She wore a blue gingham apron over her dress, her sleeves were rolled up, and her hand, when it touched my face, felt warm and soft as if it had been plunged into hot soapsuds. Then my eyes fell on a jagged burn on her wrist.

"What is that?" I asked, pointing to it. "You've hurt yourself."

"Oh, Ben, my dearest, are you really awake?"

"What is that, Sally? You have hurt yourself."

"I burned my hand on the stove — it is nothing. Dearest, are you better? Wait. Don't speak till you take your nourishment."

She went out, returning a moment later with a glass of milk and whiskey, which she held to my lips, sitting on the bedside, with her arm slipped under my pillow.

"How long have I been ill, Sally?"

"Several weeks. You became conscious and then had a relapse. Do you remember?"

"No, I remember nothing."

"Well, don't talk. Everything is all right — and I'm so happy to have you alive I could sing the Jubilee, as Aunt Euphronasia says."

"Several weeks and there was no money! Of course, you went to the General, Sally — but I forgot, the General is away. You went to somebody, though. Surely you got help?"

"Oh, I managed, Ben. There's nothing to worry about now that you are better. I feel that there'll never be anything to worry about again."

"But several weeks, Sally, and I lying like a log, and the General away! What did you do?"

"I nursed you for one thing, and gave you medicine and chicken broth and milk and whiskey. Now, I shan't talk any more until the doctor comes. Lie quiet and try to sleep."

But the jagged burn on her wrist still held my gaze, and catching her hand as she turned away, I pressed my lips to it with all my strength.

"Your hand feels so queer, Sally. It's as red as if it had been scalded."

"I've been cooking my dinner, and you see I eat a great deal. There, now, that's positively my last word."

Bending over, she kissed me hurriedly, a tear fell on my face, and then before I could catch the fluttering hem of her apron, she had broken from me, and gone out, closing the door after her. For a minute I lay perfectly motionless, too weak for thought. Then

opening my eyes with an effort, I stared straight up at the white ceiling, against which a green June beetle was knocking with a persistent, buzzing sound that seemed an accompaniment to the crooning lullaby of Aunt Euphronasia.

"Oh, we'se all gwine home ter glory, by en bye, lil' chillun,
We'se all gwine home ter glory, by en bye."

"Will he break his wings on the ceiling, or will he fly out of the window?" I thought drowsily, and it appeared to me suddenly that my personal troubles — my illness, my anxiety for Sally, and even the poverty that must have pressed upon her — had receded to an obscure and cloudy distance, in which they became less important in my mind than the problem of the green June beetle knocking against the ceiling. "Will he break his wings or will he fly out?" I asked, with a dull interest in the event, which engrossed my thoughts to the exclusion of all personal matters. "I ought to think of Sally and the child, but I can't. My head won't let me. It has gone wrong, and if I begin to think hard thoughts I'll go delirious again. There is jessamine blooming somewhere. Did she have a spray in her hair when she bent over me? Why did she wear a gingham apron at a ball instead of pink tarlatan? No, that was not the problem I had to solve. Will he break his wings or will he fly out?"

"Oh, we'll fit on de golden slippers, by en bye, lil' chillun,"

crooned Aunt Euphronasia, rocking little Benjamin in the square of sunlight.

The song soothed me and I slept for a minute. Then starting awake in the cold sweat of terror, I struggled wildly after the problem which still eluded me.

"Has he flown out?" I asked.

"Who, Marse Ben?" enquired the old negress, stopping her rocking and her lullaby at the same instant.

"The June beetle. I thought he'd break his wings on the ceiling."

"Go 'way f'om hyer, honey, he ain' gwine breck 'is wings. Dar's moughty little sense inside er dem, but dey ain' gwine do dat. Is yo' wits done come back?"

"Not quite. I feel crazy. Aunt Euphronasia!"

"W'at you atter, Marse Ben?"

"How did Sally manage?"

"Ef'n hit's de las' wud I speak, she's done managed jes exactly ez ef'n she wuz de Lawd A'moughty."

"And she didn't suffer?"

"Who? She? Dar ain' none un us suffer, honey, we'se all been livin' on de ve'y fat er de lan', we is. Dar's been roas' pig en shoat e'vy blessed day fur dinner."

She had talked me down, and I turned over again and lay in silence, until Sally came in with a dose of medicine and a cup of broth.

"Have I been very ill, Sally?"

"Very ill. It was the long mental strain, followed by the intense heat. At one time we feared that a blood vessel was broken. Now, put everything out of your mind, and get well."

She had taken off her gingham apron, and was wear-

ing one of her last summer's dresses of flowered organdie. I remembered that I had always liked it because it had blue roses over it.

"How can I get well when I know that you have been starving?"

"But we haven't been. We've had everything on earth we wanted."

"Then thank God you got help. Whom did you go to?"

Putting the empty glass aside, she began feeding me spoonfuls of broth, with her arm under my pillow.

"If you will be bad and insist upon knowing — I didn't go to anybody. You said you couldn't bear being helped, you know."

"I said it — oh, darling — but I didn't think of this!"

"Well, I thought of it, anyway, and I wasn't going to do while you were ill and helpless what you didn't want me to do when you were well."

"You mean you told nobody all these weeks?"

"Well, I told one or two people, but I didn't accept charity from them. The General was away, you know, but some people from the office came over with offers of help — and I told them we needed nothing. Dr. Theophilus was too far away to treat you, but he has come almost every day with a pitcher of Mrs. Clay's chicken broth. Oh, we've prospered, Ben, there's no doubt of that, we've prospered!"

"How soon may I get up?"

"Not for three weeks, and it will be another three weeks even if you're good, before you can go back to the office."

A sob rose in my throat, but I bit it back fiercely before it passed my lips.

"Oh, Sally, my darling, why did you marry me?"

"You cruel boy," she returned cheerfully, as she smoothed my pillows, "when you know that if I hadn't married you there wouldn't be any little Benjamin in the world."

After this the slow days dragged away, while I consumed chicken broth and milk punches with a frantic desire to get back my strength. Only to be on my feet again, and able to lift the burden from Sally's shoulders! Only to drive that tired look from her eyes, and that patient, divine smile from her lips! I watched her with jealous longing while I lay there, helpless as a fallen tree, and I saw that she grew daily thinner, that the soft redness never left her small, childlike hands, that three fine, nervous wrinkles had appeared between her arched eyebrows. Something was killing her, while I, the man who had sworn before God to cherish her, was but an additional burden on her fragile shoulders. And yet how I loved her! Never had she seemed to me more lovely, more desirable, than she did as she moved about my bed in her gingham apron, with the anxious smile on her lips, and the delicate furrows deepening between her eyebrows.

"How soon? How soon, Sally?" I asked almost hourly, kissing the scar on her wrist when she bent over me.

"Be patient, dear."

"I am trying to be patient for your sake, but oh, it's devilish hard!"

"I know it is, Ben. Another week, and you will be up."

"Another week, and this killing you!"

"It isn't killing me. If it were killing me, do you think I could laugh? And you hear me laugh?"

"Yes, I hear you laugh, and it breaks my heart as I lie here. If I'm ever up, Sally, if I'm ever well, I'll make you go to bed and I will slave over you."

"There are many things I'd enjoy more, dear. Going to bed isn't my idea of happiness."

"Then you shall sit on a cushion and eat nothing but strawberries and cream."

"That sounds better. Well, there's something I've got to see about, so I'll leave you with Aunt Euphronasia to look after you. The doctor says you may have a cup of tea if you're good. We'll make a party together."

An hour or two later, when the afternoon sunshine was shut out by the green blinds, and the room was filled with a gentle droning sound from the hummingbirds at the jessamine, she drew up the small wicker tea table to my bedside, and we made the party with merriment. Her eyes were tired, the three fine nervous wrinkles had deepened between her arched eyebrows, and the soft redness I had objected to, covered her hands; yet that spirit of gaiety, which had seemed to me to resemble the spirit of the bird singing in the old grey house, still showed in her voice and her smile. As she brewed the tea in the little brown tea-pot and poured it into the delicate cups, with the faded pattern of moss rosebuds around the brim, I won-

dered, half in a dream, from what inexhaustible source she drew this courage which faced life, not with endurance, but with blitheness. Were the ghosts of the dead Blands and Fairfaxes from whom she had sprung fighting over again their ancient battles in their descendant?

"This is a nice party, isn't it?" she asked, when she had brought the hot buttered toast from the kitchen and cut it into very small slices on my plate; "the tea smells deliciously. I paid a dollar and a quarter for a pound of it this morning."

"If I'm ever rich again you shall pay a million and a quarter, if you want to."

The charming archness awoke in her eyes, while she looked at me over the brim of the cup.

"Isn't this just as nice as being rich, Ben?" she asked; "I am really, you know, a far better cook than Aunt Mehitable."

"All the same I'd rather live on bread and water than have you do it," I answered.

She lifted her hand, pushing the heavy hair from her forehead, and my gaze fell on the jagged scar on her wrist. Then, as she caught my glance, her arm dropped suddenly under the table, and she pulled her loose muslin sleeve into place.

"Does the burn hurt you, Sally?"

"Not now — it is quite healed. At first it smarted a little."

"Darling, how did you do it?"

"I've forgotten. On the stove, I think."

I fell back on the pillow, too faint, in spite of the tea I had taken, to follow a thought in which there

was so sharp and so incessant a pang. Before my eyes the little table, with its white cloth and its fragile china service, decorated with moss rosebuds, appeared to dissolve into some painful dream distance, in which the sound of the humming-birds at the jessamine grew gradually louder.

Six days longer I remained in bed, too weak to get into my clothes, or to stand on my feet, but at the end of that time I was permitted to struggle to the square of sunlight by the window, where I sat for an hour with the warm breeze from the garden blowing into my face. For the first day or two I was unable to rise from the deep chintz-covered chair, in which Aunt Euphronasia and Sally had placed me; but one afternoon, when the old negress had returned to the kitchen, and Sally had gone out on an errand, I disobeyed their orders and crawled out on the porch, where the scent of the jessamine seemed a part of the summer sunshine. The next day I ventured as far as the kitchen steps, and found Aunt Euphronasia plucking a chicken for my broth, with little Benjamin asleep in his carriage at her side.

"Aunt Euphronasia, do you know where Sally goes every afternoon?" I enquired.

"Hi! Marse Ben, ain't un 'oman erbleeged ter teck her time off de same ez a man?" she demanded indignantly. "She cyarn' be everlastin'ly a-settin' plum at yo' elbow."

"You know perfectly well I'm not such a brute as to be complaining, mammy."

"Mebbe you ain't, honey, but hit sounds dat ar way ter me."

"If I could only make sure she'd gone to walk, *I*'d be jolly glad."

"Ef'n you ax me," she retorted contemptuously, "she ain't de sort, suh, dat's gwineter traipse jes' fur de love er traipsin'."

There was small comfort, I saw, to be had from her, so turning away, while she resumed her plucking, I crawled slowly back through the bedroom into the hall, and along the hall to the front door, which stood open. Here the dust of the street rose like steam to my nostrils, and the stone steps and the brick pavement were thickly coated. A watering-cart turned the corner, scattering a refreshing spray, and behind it came a troop of thirsty dogs, licking greedily at the water before it sank into the dust. The foliage of the trees was scorched to a livid shade, and the ends of the leaves curled upward as if a flame had blown by them. Down the street, as I stood there, came the old familiar cry from a covered wagon: "Watermillion! Hyer's yo' watermillion fresh f'om de vine!"

Clinging to the iron railing, which burned my hand, I descended the steps with trembling limbs, and stood for a minute in the patch of shade at the bottom. A negro, seated on the curbing, was drinking the juice from a melon rind, and he looked up at me with rolling eyes, his gluttonous red lips moving in rapture.

"Dish yer's a moughty good melon, Marster," he said, and returned to his feast.

As I was about to place my foot on the bottom step and begin the difficult ascent, my eyes, raised to our sitting-room window, hung spellbound on a black and white sign fastened against the panes:

"Fine laundering. Old laces a specialty. Desserts made to order."

"Old laces a specialty," I repeated, as if struck by the phrase. Then, as my strength failed me, I sank on the stone step in the patch of shade, and buried my face in my hands.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN WHICH WE RECEIVE VISITORS

I WAS still sitting there, with my head propped in my hands, when my eyes, which had seen nothing before, saw Sally coming through the hot dust in the street, with George Bolingbroke, carrying a bundle under his arm, at her side. As she neared me a perplexed and anxious look — the look I had seen always on the face of my mother when the day's burden was heavy — succeeded the smiling brightness with which she had been speaking to George.

"Why, Ben!" she exclaimed, quickening her steps, "what are you doing out here in this terrible heat?"

"I got down and couldn't get back," I answered.

"Well, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Here, George, give me the bundle and help him up."

"He deserves to be left here," remarked George, laughing good-humouredly as he grasped my arm, and half led, half dragged me up the steps and into the house. Then, when I was placed in the deep chintz-covered chair by the window, Sally came in with a milk punch, which she held to my lips while I drank.

"You're really very foolish, Ben."

"I know all, Sally," I replied, sitting up and pushing the glass and her hand away, "and I'm going to get up and go back to work to-morrow."

"Then drink this, please, so you will be able to go. I suppose you saw the sign," she pursued quietly, when I had swallowed the punch; "George saw it, too, and it put him into a rage."

"What has George got to do with it?" I demanded with a pang in my heart.

"He hasn't anything, of course, but it was kind of him all the same to want to lend me his money. You see, the way of it was that when you fell ill, and there wasn't a penny in the house, I remembered how bitterly you'd hated the idea of taking help."

I caught her hand to my lips. "I'd beg, borrow, or steal for you, darling."

"You'd neglected to tell me that, so I didn't know. What I did was to sit down and think hard for an hour, and at the end of that time, when you were well enough to be left, I got on the car and went over to see several women, who, I knew, were so rich that they had plenty of old lace and embroidery. I told them exactly how it was and, of course, they all wanted to give me money, and Jennie Randolph even sat down and cried when I wouldn't take it. Then they agreed to let me launder all their fine lace and embroidered blouses, and I've made desserts and cakes for some of them and — and —"

"Don't go on, Sally, I can't stand it. I'm a crack-brained fool and I'm going to cry."

"Of course, the worst part was having to leave you, but when George found out about it, he insisted upon fetching and carrying my bundles."

"George!" I exclaimed sharply, and a spasm of

pain, like the entrance of poison into an unhealed wound, contracted my heart. "Was that confounded package under his arm," I questioned, almost angrily, "some of the stuff?"

"That was a blouse of Maggie Tyler's. He is going to take it back to her on Friday. There, now, stay quiet, while I run and speak to him. He is waiting for me in the kitchen."

She went out, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for her to take in washing and for George to deliver it, while, opening the long green shutters, I sat staring, beyond the humming-birds and the white columns, to the shimmering haze that hung over the old tea-roses and the dwindled box in the garden. Here the heat, though it was still visible to the eyes, was softened and made fragrant by the greenness of the trees and the grass and by the perfume of the jessamine and the old tea-roses, dropping their faintly coloured leaves in the sunshine. From time to time the sounds of the city, grown melancholy and discordant, like the sounds that one hears in fever, reached me across the shimmering vagueness of the garden.

And then as I sat there, with folded hands, there came to me, out of some place, so remote that it seemed a thousand miles away from the sunny stillness, and yet so near that I knew it existed only within my soul, a sense of failure, of helplessness, of humiliation. A hundred casual memories thronged through my mind, and all these memories, gathering significance from my imagination, plunged me deeper into the bitter despondency which had closed over my head. I saw the General, with his little, alert

bloodshot eyes, like the eyes of an intelligent bull-dog, with that look of stubbornness, of tenacity, persisting beneath the sly humour that gleamed in his face, as if he were thinking always somewhere far back in his brain, "I'll hang on to the death, I'll hang on to the death." His figure, which, because of that legendary glamour I had seen surrounding it in childhood, still personified shining success in my eyes, appeared to add a certain horror to this sense of helplessness, of failure, that dragged me under. Deep down within me, down below my love for Sally or for the child, something older than any emotion, older than any instinct except the instinct of battle, awakened and passed from passiveness into violence. "Let me but start again in the race," said this something, "let me but stand once more on my feet." The despondency, which had been at first formless and vague as mere darkness, leaped suddenly into a tangible shape, and I felt that the oppressive weight of the debt on my shoulders was the weight, not of thought, but of metal. Until that was lifted — until I had struggled free — I should be crippled, I told myself, not only in ambition, but in body.

From the detached kitchen, at the end of the short brick walk, overgrown with wild violets, that led to it, the sound of George's laugh fell on my ears. Rising to my feet with an effort, I stood listening, without thought, to the sound, which seemed to grow vacant and sad as it floated to me in the warm air over the sunken bricks. Then passing through the long window, I descended the steps slowly, and stopped in the shadow of a pink crape myrtle that grew near the

kitchen doorway. Again the merriment came to me, Sally's laughter mingling this time with George's.

"No, that will never do. This is the way," she said, in her sparkling voice, which reminded me always of running water.

"Sally!" I called, and moving nearer, I paused at the kitchen step, while she came quickly forward, with some white, filmy stuff she had just rinsed in the tub still in her hands.

"Why, here's Ben!" she exclaimed. "You bad boy, when I told you positively not to get up out of that chair!"

A gingham apron was pinned over her waist and bosom, her sleeves were rolled back, and I saw the redness from the hot soapsuds rising from her hands to her elbows.

"For God's sake, Sally, what are you doing?" I demanded, and reaching out, as I swayed slightly, I caught the lintel of the door for support.

"I'm washing and George is splitting kindling wood," she replied cheerfully, shaking out the white, filmy stuff with an upward movement of her bare arms; "the boy who splits the wood never came — I think he ate too many currants yesterday — and if George hadn't offered his services as man of all work, I dread to think what you and Aunt Euphronasia would have eaten for supper."

"It's first-rate work for the muscles, Ben," remarked George, flinging an armful of wood on the brick floor, and kneeling beside the stove to kindle a fire in the old ashes. "I haven't a doubt but it's better for the back and arms than horseback riding.

All the same," he added, poking vigorously at the smouldering embers, "I'm going to wallop that boy as soon as I've got this fire started."

"You won't have time to do that until you've delivered the day's washing," rejoined Sally, with merriment.

"Yes, I shall. I'll stop on my way — that boy comes first," returned George with a grim, if humorous, determination.

This humour, this lightness, and above all this gallantry, which was so much a part of the older civilisation to which they belonged, wrought upon my disordered nerves with a feeling of anger. Here, at last, I had run against that "something else" of the Blands', apart from wealth, apart from position, apart even from blood, of which the General had spoken Miss Mitty might go in rags and do her own cooking, he had said, but as long as she possessed this "something else," that supported her, she would preserve to the end, in defiance of circumstances, her terrible importance.

"You know I don't care a bit what I eat, Sally!" I blurted out, in a temper.

"Well, you may not, dear, but George and I do," she rejoined, pinning the white stuff on a clothes-line she had stretched between the door and the window, "we are both interested, you see, in getting you back to work. There's the door-bell, George. You may wash your hands at the sink and answer it. If it's the butter, bring it to me, and if it's a caller, let him wait, while I turn down my sleeves."

Rising from his knees, George washed his hands at

the sink, and went out along the brick walk to the house, while I stood in the doorway, under the shadow of the pink crape myrtle, and made a vow in my heart.

"Sally," I said at last in the agony of desperation, "you ought to have married George."

With her arms still upraised to the clothes-line, she looked round at me over her shoulder.

"He is useful in an emergency," she admitted; "but, after all, the emergency isn't the man, you know."

I was about to press the point home to conscience, when George, returning along the walk, announced with the mock solemnity of a footman in livery, that the callers were Dr. Theophilus and the General, who awaited us in the sitting-room.

"There's no hurry, Sally," he added; "they started over to condole with you, I imagine, but they've both become so absorbed in discussing this neighbourhood as it was fifty years ago, that I honestly believe they've entirely forgotten that you live here."

"Well, we'll have to remind them," said Sally, with a laugh; and when she had rolled down her sleeves and tidied her hair before the cracked mirror on the wall, we went back to the house, where we found the two old men engaged in a violent controversy over the departed inhabitants of Church Hill.

"I tell you, Theophilus, it wasn't Robert Carrington, but his brother Bushrod that lived in that house!" exclaimed the General, as we entered; and he concluded — while he shook hands with us, in the tone of one who forever clinches an argument, "I can take you this minute straight over there to his grave in

Saint John's Churchyard. How are you, Ben, glad to see you up," he observed in an absent-minded manner. "Have you got a palm-leaf fan around, Sally? I can't get through these sweltering afternoons without a fan. What do you think Theophilus is arguing about now? He is trying to prove to me that it was Robert Carrington, not Bushrod, who lived in that big house at the top of the hill. Why, I tell you I knew Bushrod Carrington as well as I did my own brother, sir."

He sat far back in his chair, pursing his full red lips angrily, like a whimpering child, and fanning himself with short, excited movements of the palm-leaf fan. His determined, mottled face was covered thickly with fine drops of perspiration.

"I knew Robert very intimately," remarked the doctor, in a peaceable voice. "He married Matty Price, and I was the best man at his wedding. They lived unhappily, I believe, but he told me on his death-bed — I attended him in his last illness — that he would do it over again if he had to re-live his life. 'I never had a dull minute after I married her, doctor,' he said, 'I lived with her for forty years and I never knew what was coming next till she died.'"

"Robert was a fool," commented the General, brusquely, "a long white-livered, studious fellow that dragged around at his wife's apron strings. Couldn't hold a candle to his brother Bushrod. When I was a boy, Bushrod Carrington — he was nearer my father's age than mine — was the greatest dandy and duellist in the state. Got all his clothes in Paris, and I can see him now, as plainly as if it were yesterday, when

he used to come to church in a peachblow brocade waistcoat of a foreign fashion, and his hair shining with pomatum. Yes, he was a great duellist — that was the age of duels. Shot a man the first year he came back from France, didn't he?"

"A sad scamp, but a good husband," remarked the doctor, ignoring the incident of the duel. "I remember when his first child was born, he was on his knees praying the whole time, and then when it was over he went out and got as drunk as a lord. 'Where's Bushrod?' were the first words his wife spoke, and when some fool answered her, 'Bushrod's drunk, Bessy,' she replied, like an angel, 'Poor fellow, I know he needs it.' They were a most devoted couple, I always heard. Who was she, George? It's gone out of my mind. Was she Bessy Randolph?"

"No, Bessy Randolph was his first flame, and when she threw him over for Ned Peyton, he married Bessy Tucker. They used to say that when he couldn't get one Bessy, he took the other. Yes, he made a devoted husband, never a wild oat to sow after his marriage. I remember when I called on him once, when he was living in that big house there on top of the hill —"

"I think you're wrong about that, George. I am sure it was Robert who lived there. When I attended him in his last illness —"

"I reckon I know where Bushrod Carrington lived, Theophilus. I've been there often enough. The house you're talking about is over on the other side of the hill, and was built by Robert."

"Well, I'm perfectly positive, George, that when I attended Robert in his last illness —"

"His last illness be hanged! I tell you what, Theophilus, you're getting entirely too opinionated for a man of your years. If it grows on you, you'll be having an attack of apoplexy next. Have you got a glass of iced water you can give Theophilus, Sally?"

"I'll get it," said young George, as Sally rose, and when he had gone out in response to her nod, the General, cooling a little, glanced with a sly wink from Sally to me. "You put me in mind of Bushrod's first flame, Bessy Randolph, my dear," he observed; "she was a great belle and beauty and half the men in Virginia proposed to her, they used to say, before she married Ned Peyton. 'No, I can't accept you for a husband,' the minx would reply, 'but I think you will do very well indeed as a hanger-on.' It looks as if you'd got George for a hanger-on, eh?"

"At present she's got him in place of a boy-of-all-jobs," I observed lightly, though a fierce misery worked in my mind.

"Well, she can't do better," said the doctor, as they prepared to leave. "Let me hear how you are, Ben. Don't eat too much till you get back your strength, and be sure to take your egg-nog three times a day. Come along, George, and we'll look up Robert's and Bushrod's graves in the churchyard. You'd better bring the palm-leaf fan, you'll probably need it."

They descended the curving steps leisurely, the General clinging to the railing on one side, and supported by George on the other. Then, at last, after many protestations of sympathy, and not a few anecdotes forgotten until the instant of departure revived the memory, the old grey horse, deciding suddenly

that it was time for oats and the cool stable, started of his own accord up the street toward the churchyard. As the buggy passed out of sight, with the palm-leaf fan waving frantically when it turned the corner, George came up the steps again, and going indoors, brought out the little bundle of lace that he was to deliver to its owner on his way home.

"Keep up your pluck, Ben," he said cheerfully; and turning away, he looked at Sally with a long, thoughtful gaze as he held out his hand.

"Now, I'm going to wallop that boy," he remarked, after a minute. "Is there anything else? I'll be over to-morrow as soon as I can get off from the office."

"Nothing else," she replied; then, as he was moving away, she leaned forward, with that bloom and softness in her look which always came to her in moments when she was deeply stirred. "George!" she called, in a low voice, "George!"

He stopped and came back, meeting her vivid face with eyes that grew suddenly dark and gentle.

"It's just to say that I don't know what in the world I should have done without you," she said.

Again he turned from her, and this time he went quickly, without looking back, along the dusty street in the direction of the car line beyond the corner.

"You've been up too long, Ben, and you're as white as a sheet," said Sally, putting her hand on my arm. "Come, now, and lie down again while Aunt Euphronasia is cooking supper. I must iron Maggie Tyler's blouse as soon as it is dry."

The mention of Maggie Tyler's blouse was all I

needed to precipitate me into the abyss above which I had stood. Too miserable to offer useless comment upon so obvious a tragedy, I followed her in silence back to the bedroom, where she placed me on the bed and flung a soft, thin coverlet over my prostrate body. She was still standing beside me, when Aunt Euphronasia hobbled excitedly into the room, and looking across the threshold, I discerned a tall, slender figure, shrouded heavily in black, hovering in the dim hall beyond.

"Hi! hi! honey, hyer's Miss Mitty done come ter see you!" exclaimed Aunt Euphronasia, in a burst of ecstasy.

Sally turned with a cry, and the next instant she was clasped in Miss Mitty's arms, with her head hidden in the rustling crape on the old lady's shoulder.

"I've just heard that you were in trouble, and that your husband was ill," said Miss Mitty, when she had seated herself in the chair by the window; "I came over at once, though I hadn't left the house for a year except to go out to Hollywood."

"It was so good of you, Aunt Mitty, so good of you," replied Sally, caressing her hand.

"If I'd only known sooner, I should have come. You are looking very badly, my child."

"Ben will be well quickly now, and then I can rest."

At this she turned toward me, and enquired in a gentle, reserved way about my illness, the nature of the fever, and the pain from which I had suffered.

"I hope you had the proper food, Ben," she said, calling me for the first time by my name; "I am sorry

that I could not supply you with my chicken jelly. Dr. Theophilus tells me he considers it superior to any he has ever tried — even to Mrs. Clay's."

"Comfort Sally, Miss Mitty, and it will do me more good than chicken jelly."

For a minute she sat looking at me kindly in silence. Then, as little Benjamin was brought, she took him upon her lap, and remarked that he was a beautiful baby, and that she already discerned in him the look of her Uncle Theodoric Fairfax.

"I should like you to come to my house as soon as you are able to move," she said presently, as she rose to go, and paused for a minute to bend over and kiss little Benjamin. "You will be more comfortable there, though the air is, perhaps, fresher over here."

I thanked her with tears in my eyes, and a resolve in my mind that at least Sally and the baby should accept the offer.

"There is a basket of old port in the sitting-room; I thought it might help to strengthen you," were her last words as she passed out, with Sally clinging to her arm, and the crape veil she still wore for Miss Matoaca rustling as she moved.

"Po' Miss Mitty has done breck so I 'ouldn't hev knowed her f'om de daid," observed Aunt Euphronasia, when the front door had closed and the sound of rapidly rolling wheels had passed down the street.

All night Sally and I talked of her, she resisting and I entreating that she should go to her old home for the rest of the summer.

"How can I leave you, Ben? How can you possibly do without me?"

"Don't bother about me. I'll manage to scrape along, somehow. There are two things that are killing me, Sally — the fact of owing money that I can't pay, and the thought of your toiling like a slave over my comfort."

"I'll go, then, if you will come with me."

"You know I can't come with you. She only asked me, you must realise, out of pity."

"Well, I shan't go a step without you," she said decisively at last, "for I don't see how on earth you would live through the summer if I did."

"I don't see either," I admitted honestly, looking at her, as she stood in the frame of the long window, the ruffles of her muslin dressing-gown blowing gently in the breeze which had sprung up in the garden. Beyond her there was a pale dimness, and the fresh, moist smell of the dew on the grass.

What she had said was the truth. How could I have lived through the summer if she had left me? Since the night after my failure, when we had come, for the first time, face to face with each other, I had leaned on her with all the weight of my crippled strength; and this weight, instead of crushing her to the earth, appeared to add vigour and buoyancy to her slender figure. Long afterwards, when my knowledge of her had come at last, not through love, but through bitterness, I wondered why I had not understood on that night, while I lay there watching her pale outline framed by the window. Love, not meat and drink, was her nourishment, and without love, though I were to surround her with all the fruits of the earth, she would still be famished. That she was

strong, I had already learned. What I was still to discover was that this strength lay less in character than in emotion. Her very endurance — her power of sustained sympathy, of sacrifice — had its birth in some strangely idealised quality of passion — as though even suffering or duty was enkindled by this warm, clear flame that burned always within her.

As the light broke, we were awakened, after a few hours' restless sleep, by a sharp ring at the bell; and when she had slipped into her wrapper and answered it, she came back very slowly, holding an open note in her hands.

"Oh, poor Aunt Mitty, poor Aunt Mitty. She died all alone in her house last night, and the servants found her this morning."

"Well, the last thing she did was a kindness," I said gently.

"I'm glad of that, glad she came to see me, but, Ben, I can't help believing that it killed her. She had Aunt Matoaca's heart trouble, and the strain was too much." Then, as I held out my arms, she clung to me, weeping. "Never leave me alone, Ben — whatever happens, never, never leave me alone!"

A few days later, when Miss Mitty's will was opened, it was found that she had left to Sally her little savings of the last few years, which amounted to ten thousand dollars. The house, with her income, passed from her to the hospital endowed by Edmond Bland in a fit of rage with his youngest daughter; and the old lady's canary and the cheque, which fluttered some

weeks later from the lawyer's letter, were the only possessions of hers that reached her niece.

"She left the miniature of me painted when I was a child to George," said Sally, with the cheque in her hand; "George was very good to her at the end. Did you ever notice my miniature, framed in pearls, that she wore sometimes, in place of grandmama's, at her throat?"

I had not noticed it, and the fact that I had never seen it, and was perfectly unaware whether or not it resembled Sally, seemed in some curious way to increase, rather than to diminish, the jealous pain at my heart. Why should George have been given this trifle, which was associated with Sally, and which I had never seen?

She leaned forward and the cheque fluttered into my plate.

"Take the money, Ben, and do what you think best with it," she added.

"It belongs to you. Wouldn't you rather keep it in bank as a nest-egg?"

"No, take it. I had everything of yours as long as you had anything."

"Then it goes into bank for you all the same," I replied, as I slipped the paper into my pocket.

An hour later, as I passed in the car down the long hill, I told myself that I would place the money to Sally's account, in order that she might draw on it until I had made good the strain of my illness. My first intention had been to go into the bank on my way to the office; but glancing at my watch as I left the car, I found that it was already after nine o'clock,

and so returning the cheque to my pocket, I crossed the street, where I found the devil of temptation awaiting me in the person of Sam Brackett.

"I say, Ben, if you had a little cash, here's an opportunity to make your fortune rise," he remarked; "I've just given George a tip and he's going in."

"You'd better keep out of it, Ben," said George, wheeling round suddenly after he had nodded and turned away. "It's copper, and you know if there's a thing on earth that can begin to monkey when you don't expect it to, it's the copper trade."

"Bonanza copper mining stock is selling at zero again," commented Sam imperturbably, "and if it doesn't go up like a shot, then I'm a deader."

Whether his future was to be that of a deader or not concerned me little; but while I stood there on the crowded pavement, with my eyes on the sky, I had a sudden sensation, as if the burden of debt — which was the burden, not of thought, but of metal — had been removed from my shoulders. My first fortune had been made in copper, — why not repeat it? That one minute's sense of release, of freedom, had gone like wine to my head. I saw stretching away from me the dull years I must spend in chains, but I saw, also, in the blessed vision which Sam Brackett had called up, the single means of escape.

"What does the General think of it, George?" I enquired.

"He's putting in money, I believe, moderately as usual," replied George, with a worried look on his face; "but I tell you frankly, Ben, whether it's a good

thing or not, if that's Miss Mitty's legacy, you oughtn't to speculate with it. Sally might need it."

"Sally needs a thousand times more," I returned, not without irritation, "and I shall get it for her in the way I can." Then I held out my hand. "You're a first-rate chap, George," I added, "but just think what it would mean to Sally if I could get out of debt at a jump."

"I dare say," he responded, "but I'm not sure that putting your last ten thousand dollars in the Bonanza copper mining stock is a rational way of doing it."

"Such things aren't done in a rational way. The secret of successful speculating is to be willing to dare everything for something. Sam's got faith in the Bonanza, and he knows a hundred times as much about it as you or I."

"If it doesn't rise," said Sam emphatically, "then I'm a deader."

I still saw the dull years stretching ahead, and I still felt the tangible weight on my shoulders of the two hundred thousand dollars I owed. The old prostrate instinct of the speculator, which is but the gambler's instinct in better clothes, lifted its head within me.

"Well, it won't do any harm to go into Townley's and find out about it," I said, moving in the direction of the broker's office next door.

CHAPTER XXX

IN WHICH SALLY PLANS

My first sensation after putting Sally's ten thousand dollars into copper mining stock was one of immense relief, almost of exhilaration, as if I already heard in my fancy the clanking of the loosened chains as they dropped from me. I recalled, one by one, the incidents of my earliest "risky" and yet fortunate venture, when, following the General's advice, I had gone in boldly, and after a short period of breathless fluctuation, had "realised," as he had said, "a nice little fortune for a first hatching." And because this seemed to me the single means of recovery, because I had so often before in my life been guided by some infallible instinct to seize the last chance that in the outcome had proved to be the right way, I felt now that reliance upon fortune, that assurance of the thing hoped for, which was as much a portion of experience as it was a quality of temperament.

At home, when I reached there late in the afternoon, I found Sally just stepping out of the General's buggy, while the great man, sacrificing gallantry to the claims of gout, sat, under his old-fashioned linen dust robe, holding the slackened reins over the grey horse.

"We've got a beautiful plan, Ben, the General and I," remarked Sally, when he had driven away, and we were

entering the house; "but it's a secret, and you're not to know of it until it is ready to be divulged."

"Is George aware of it?" I asked irrelevantly, moved by I know not what spirit of averseness.

"Yes, we've let George into it, but I'm not perfectly sure that he approves. The idea came to the General and to me almost at the same instant, and that is a very good thing to be said of any idea. It proves it to be an elastic one anyway."

She talked merrily through supper, breaking into smiles from time to time, caressing evidently this idea which was so elastic, and which she declined provokingly to divulge. But I, also, had my secret, for my mind, responding to the springs of hope, toyed ceaselessly with the possibility of escape. For several weeks this dream of ultimate freedom possessed my thoughts, and then, at last, when the copper trade, instead of reviving, seemed paralysed for a season, I awakened with a shock, to the knowledge that I had lost Sally's little fortune as irretrievably as I appeared to have lost my larger one. Clearly my financial genius was asleep, or off assisting at a sacrifice; and it did little good, as I toiled home in the afternoon, to curse myself frantically for a perverse and a thankless brute. It was too late now; I had played the fool once too often and the money was gone. Was my brain weakened permanently by the fever, I wondered? Had the muscles of my will dwindled away and grown flabby, like the muscles of my body?

As I left the car, a group of school children ran along the pavement in front of me, and then scattering like pigeons, fluttered after a big, old-fashioned barouche

that had turned the corner. When it came nearer, I saw that the barouche was the General's, a piece of family property which had descended to him from his father, and that the great man now sat on the deep, broadcloth-covered cushions, his legs very far apart, his hands clasped on his gold-headed walking-stick, and his square, mottled face staring straight ahead, with that look of tenacity, as if he were saying somewhere back in his brain, "I'll hang on to the death."

Before our door, where Sally was waiting in her hat and veil, the barouche drew up with a flourish; Balaam, the old negro coachman, settled himself for a doze on the box, and the pair of fat roans began switching their long tails in the faces of the swarming school children.

"So you're just in time, Ben," remarked the General, while he hobbled out in order to help Sally in. "I thought you'd have been at home at least an hour ago. Meant to come earlier, but something went wrong at the stables. Something always is wrong at the stables. I wouldn't be in George's shoes for a mint of money. Never a day passes that he isn't fussing about his horses, or his traps, or his groom. Well, you're ready, Sally? I like a woman who is punctual, and I never in my life knew but one who was. That was your Aunt Matoaca. You get it from her, I suppose. Ah, *she* never kept you waiting a minute, — no fussing about gloves or fans or handkerchiefs. Always just ready when you came for her, and looking like an angel. Never saw her in a rose-lined bonnet, did you, my dear?"

"Only in black, General," replied Sally, as she took her seat in the barouche. "Come, get in, Ben, we're

going to reveal our secret at last, and we want you to be with us."

The General got in again with difficulty, groaning a little; I entered and sat down opposite to them, with my back to the horses; and the old negro coachman, disappointed at the length of the wait, pulled the reins gently and gave a slight, admonishing flick at the broad flanks of the roans. Behind the barouche the school children still fluttered, and turning in his seat, the General looked back angrily and threatened them with a wave of his big ebony walking-stick.

"What is it, Sally?" I asked, striving to force a curiosity my wretchedness prevented me from feeling; "can't you unfold the mystery?"

"Be patient, be patient," she responded gaily, leaning back beside the General, as we rolled down the wide street under the wilted, dusty leaves of the trees. "Haven't you noticed for weeks that the General and I have had a secret?"

"Yes, I've noticed it, but I thought you'd tell me when the time came."

"We shan't tell him, shall we, General? — We'll show him."

"Ah, there's time enough, time enough," returned the General, absent-mindedly, for he had not been listening. His resolute, bulldog face, flushed now by the heat and covered with a fine perspiration, had taken on an absorbed and pondering look. "I never come along here that it doesn't put me back at least fifty years," he observed, leaning over his side of the barouche, and peering down one of the side streets that led past the churchyard. "Sorry they've been meddling with that

old church. Better have left it as it used to be in my boyhood. Do you see that little house there, set back in the yard, with the chimney crumbling to pieces? That was the first school I ever went to, and it was taught by old Miss Deborah Timberlake, the sister of William Timberlake who shot all those stags' heads you've got hanging in your hall. Nobody ever knew why she taught school. Plenty to eat and drink. William gave her everything that she wanted, but she got cranky when she'd turned sixty, and insisted on being independent. Independent, she said! Pish! Tush. Never learned a word from her. Taught us English history, then Virginia history. As for the rest of America, she used to say it didn't have a history, merely a past. Mentioned the Boston tea party once by mistake, and had to explain that *that* was an incident, not history. Well, well, it seems a thousand years ago. Never could understand, to save my life, why she took to teaching. Had all she wanted. Her brother William was an odd man. A fine toast. I never heard a better story — I remember them even as a boy — and often enough I've got them off since his death. Used to ill-treat his slaves, though, they said, and had queer ideas about women and property. Married his wife who didn't have a red penny, and on his wedding journey, when she called him by his name, replied to her, 'Madam, my dependants are accustomed to address me as Mr. Timberlake.' Ha, ha! a queer bird was William."

The street was the one down which I had passed so many years ago, wedged tightly between my mother and Mrs. Kidd, to the funeral of old Mr. Cudlip; and

it seemed to me that it held unchanged, as if it had stagnated there between the quaint old houses, that same atmosphere of sadness, of desolation. The houses, still half closed, appeared all but deserted; the aged negresses, staring after us under their hollowed palms, looked as if they had stood there forever. Progress, which had invaded the neighbouring quarters, had left this one, as yet, undisturbed.

Opposite to me, Sally smiled with beaming eyes when she met my gaze. I knew that she was hugging her secret, and I knew, in some intuitive way, that she expected this secret to afford me pleasure. The General, peering from right to left in search of associations, kept moving his lips as if he were thinking aloud. On his face, in the deep creases where the perspiration had gathered, the dust, rising from the street, had settled in greyish streaks. From time to time, in an absent-minded manner, he got out his big white silk handkerchief and wiped it away.

"There now! I've got it! Hold on a minute, Balaam. That's the house that Robert Carrington built clean over here on the other side of the hill. There it is now — the one with that pink crape myrtle in the yard, and the four columns, you can see it with your own eyes. Theophilus tried to prove to me that Robert lived in Bushrod's house, and that he'd attended him there in his last illness. Last illness, indeed! The truth is that Theophilus isn't what he once was. Memory's going and he doesn't like to own it. No use arguing with him — you can't argue with a man whose memory is going — but there's Robert Carrington's house. You've seen it with your own eyes. Drive on, Balaam."

Balaam drove on, and the carriage, leaving the city and the thinning suburbs, passed rapidly into one of the country roads, white with dust, which stretched between ragged borders of yarrow and pokeberry that were white with dust also. The fields on either side, sometimes planted in corn, oftener grown wild in broomsedge or life-everlasting, shimmered under the heat, which was alive with the whirring of innumerable insects. Here and there a negro cabin, built close to the road, stood bare in a piece of burned-out clearing, or showed behind the thick fanlike leaves of gourd vines, with the heads of sunflowers nodding heavily beside the open doorways. Occasionally, in the first few miles, a covered wagon crawled by us on its way to town, the driver leaning far over the dusty horses, and singing out "Howdy!" in a friendly voice, — to which the General invariably responded "Howdy," in the same tone, as he touched the wide brim of his straw hat with his ebony stick.

"Hasn't got on the scent, has he?" he enquired presently of Sally, with a sly wink in my direction. "Are you sure George hasn't let it out? Never could keep a secret, could George. He's one of those close-mouthed fellows that shuts a thing up so tight it explodes before he's aware of it. He can't hide anything from me. I read him just as if he were a book. It's as well, I reckon, as I told him the other day, that he isn't still in love with your wife, Ben, or it would be written all over him as plain as big print."

My eyes caught Sally's, and she blushed a clear, warm pink to the heavy waves of her hair.

"Not that he'd ever be such a rascal as to keep up a

fancy for a married woman," pursued the great man, unseeing and unthinking. "The Bolingbrokes may have been wild, but they've always been men of honour, and even if they've played fast and loose now and then with a woman, they have never tried to pilfer anything that belonged to another man."

"I think we're coming to it," said Sally suddenly, trying to turn the conversation to lighter matters.

"Ah, so we are, so we are. That's a good view of the river, and there's the railroad station at the foot of the hill not a half mile away. It's the very thing you need, Ben, it will be the making of you and of the youngster, as I said to Sally when the idea first entered my mind."

The barouche made a quick turn into a straight lane bordered by old locust trees, and stopped a few minutes later before a square red brick country house, with four white columns supporting the portico, and a bower of ancient ivy growing over the roof.

"Here we are at last! Oh, Ben, don't you like it?" said Sally, springing to the ground before the horses had stopped.

"Like it? Of course he likes it," returned the General, impatiently, as he got out and followed her between the rows of calycanthus bushes that edged the walk. "What business has he got not to like it after all the trouble we've been to on his account? It's the very thing for his health — that's what I said to you, my dear, as soon as I heard of Miss Mitty's legacy. 'The old Bending place is for sale and will go cheap,' I said. 'Why not move out into the country and give Ben and the youngster a chance to breathe fresh air?

He's beginning to look seedy and fresh air will set him up.'"

"But I really don't believe he likes it," rejoined Sally, a little wistfully, turning, as she reached the columns of the portico, and looking doubtfully into my face.

"You know I like anything that you like, Sally," I answered in a voice which, I knew, sounded flat and unenthusiastic, in spite of my effort; "it's a fine house and there's a good view of the river, I dare say, at the back."

"I thought it would please you, Ben. It seemed to the General and me the very best thing we could do with Aunt Mitty's money."

There was a hurt look in her eyes; her mouth trembled as she spoke, and all the charming mystery had fled from her manner. If we had been alone I should have opened my arms to her, and have made my confession with her head on my shoulder; but the square, excited figure of the General, who kept marching aimlessly up and down between the calycanthus bushes, put the restraint of a terrible embarrassment upon my words. Tell her I must, and yet how could I tell her while the little cynical bloodshot eyes of the great man were upon us?

"Let's go to the back. We can see the river from the terrace," she said, and there was a touching disappointment in her smile and her voice.

"Yes, we'll go to the back," responded the General, with eagerness. "Follow this path, Ben, the one that leads round the west wing," and he added when we had turned the corner of the house, and stopped on the trim

terrace, covered with beds of sweet-william and foxglove, "What do you think of that for a view now? If those big poplars were out of the way, you could see clear down to Merrivale, the old Smith place, where I used to go as a boy."

Meeting the disappointment in Sally's look, I tried to rise valiantly to the occasion; but it was evident, even while I uttered my empty phrases, that to all of us, except the General, the mystery had been blighted by some deadly chill in the very instant of its unfolding. The great man alone, with that power of ignoring the obvious, which had contributed so largely to his success, continued his running comments in his cheerful, dogmatic tone. Some twenty minutes later, when, after an indifferent inspection of the house on our part, and a vigilant one on the General's, we rolled back again in the barouche over the dusty road, he was still perfectly unaware that the surprise he had sprung had not been attended by a triumph of pleasure for us all.

"You're foolish, my dear, about those big poplars," he said a dozen times, while he sat staring, with an unseeing gaze, at the thin red line of the sunset over the corn-fields. "They ought to come down, and then you could see clean to the old Smith place, where I used to go as a boy. I learned to shoot there. Fell in love, too, when I wasn't more than twelve with Miss Lucy Smith, my first flame — pretty as a pink, all the boys were in love with her."

Sally's hand stole into mine under the muslin ruffles of her dress, and her eyes, when she looked at me, held a soft, deprecating expression, as if she were trying to understand, and could not, how she had hurt me. When

at last we came to our own door and the General, after insisting again that the only improvement needed to the place was that the big poplars should come down, had driven serenely away in his big barouche, we ascended the steps in silence, and entered the sitting-room, which was filled with the pale gloom of twilight. While I lighted the lamp, she waited in the centre of the room, with the soft, deprecating expression still in her eyes.

"What is it, Ben?" she asked, facing the lamp as I turned; "did you mind my keeping the idea a secret? Why, I thought that would please you."

"It isn't that, Sally, it isn't that, — but — I've lost the money."

"Lost it, Ben?"

"I saw what I thought was a good chance to speculate — and I speculated."

"You speculated with the ten thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"And lost it?"

"Yes."

For a moment her face was inscrutable.

"When did it happen?"

"I found out to-day that it was gone beyond hope of recovery."

"Then you haven't known it all along and kept it from me?"

"I was going to tell you as soon as I came up this afternoon, but the General was here."

"I am glad of that," she said quietly. "If you had kept anything from me and worried over it, it would have broken my heart."

"Sally, I have been a fool."

"Yes, dear."

"Heaven knows, I don't mean to add to your troubles, but when I think of all that I've brought you to, I feel as if I should go out of my mind."

She put her hand on my arm, smiling up at me with her old sparkling gaiety. "Come and sit down by me, and we'll have a cup of tea, and you'll feel better. But first I must tell you that I am a terribly extravagant person, Ben, for I paid another dollar and a quarter for a pound of tea this morning."

"Thank heaven for it," I returned devoutly.

"And there's something else. I feel my sins growing on me. Do you remember last winter, when you were worrying so over your losses, and didn't know where you could turn for cash — do you remember that I paid five thousand dollars — five thousand dollars, you understand, and that's half of ten — for a lace gown?"

"Did you, darling?"

"Do you remember what you said?"

"'Thank you for the privilege of paying for it,' I hope."

"You paid the bill, and never told me I oughtn't to have bought it. What you said was, 'I'm awfully glad you've got such a becoming dress, because business is going badly, and we may have to pull up for a while.' Then I found out from George that you'd sold your motor car, and everything else you could lay hands on to meet the daily expenses. Now, Ben, tell me honestly which is the worse sinner, you or I?"

"But that was my fault, too — everything was my fault."

"The idea of your committing the extravagance of a lace gown! Why, you couldn't even tell the difference between imitation and real. And that pound of tea! You know you'd never have gone out and spent your last dollar and a quarter on a pound of tea."

"If you'd wanted it, Sally."

"Well, you speculated with that ten thousand dollars from exactly the same motive — because you thought I wanted so much that I didn't have. But I bought that gown entirely to gratify my vanity — so you see, after all, I'm a great deal the worse sinner of us two. There, now, I must see about the baby. He was very fretful all the morning, and the doctor says it is the heat. I'm sure, Ben, that he ought to get out of the city. How can we manage it?"

"I'll manage it, dear. The General will be only too glad to lend the money. I'll go straight over and explain matters to him."

A cry came from little Benjamin in the nursery, and kissing me hurriedly with, "Remember, I'm a sinner, Ben," she left the room, while I took up my hat again, and went up-town to make my confession to the General and request his assistance.

"Lend it to you, you scamp!" he exclaimed, when I found him on his front porch with a palm-leaf fan in his hand. "Of course, I'll lend it to you; but why in the deuce were you so blamed cheerful this afternoon about that house in the country? I could have sworn you were in a gale over the idea. Here, Hatty, bring me a pen. I can see perfectly well by this damned electric light they've stuck at my door. Well, I'm

sorry enough for you, Ben. It's hard on your wife, and she's the kind of woman that makes a man believe in the angels. Her Aunt Matoaca all over — you know, George, I always told you that Sally Mickleborough was the image of her Aunt Matoaca."

"I know you did," replied George, twirling the end of his mustache. He looked tired and anxious, and it seemed to me suddenly that the whole city, and every face in it, under the white blaze of the electric light, had this same tired and anxious expression.

I took the cheque, put it into my pocket with a word of thanks, and turned to the steps.

"I can't stay, General, while the baby is ill. Sally may need me."

"Well, you're right, Ben, stick to her when she needs you, and you'll find she'll stick to you. I've always said that gratitude counted stronger in the sex than love."

As I went down the steps George joined me, and walked with me to the car line. The look on his face brought to my memory the night I had seen him staring moodily across the roses and lilies at Sally's bare shoulders, and the same fierce instinct of possession gnawed in my heart.

"Look here, Ben, I can't bear to think of the way things are going with Sally," he said.

"I can't bear to think of it myself," I returned gloomily.

"If there's ever anything I can do — remember I am at your service."

"I'll remember it, George," I answered, angry with myself because my gratitude was shot through with a

less noble feeling. "I'll remember it, and I thank you, too."

"Then it's a bargain. You won't let her suffer because you're too proud to take help?"

"No, I won't let her suffer if I have to beg to prevent it. Haven't I just done so?"

He held out his hand, I wrung it in mine, and then, as I got on the car, he turned away and walked at his lazy step back along the block. Looking from the car window, as it passed on, I saw his slim, straight figure moving, with bent head, as if plunged in thought, under the electric light at the corner.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DEEPEST SHADOW

As I entered the house, the sound of Aunt Euphronasia's crooning fell on my ears, and going into the nursery, I found Sally sitting by the window, with the child on her knees, while the old negress waved a palm-leaf fan back and forth with a slow, rhythmic movement. A night-lamp burned, with lowered wick, on the bureau, and as Sally looked up at me, I saw that her face had grown wan and haggard since I had left her.

"The baby was taken very ill just after you went," she said; "we feared a convulsion, and I sent one of the neighbours' children for the doctor. It may be only the heat, he says, but he is coming again at midnight."

"I had hoped you would be able to get off in the morning."

"No, not now. The baby is too ill. In a few days, perhaps, if he is better."

Her voice broke, and kneeling beside her, I clasped them both in my arms, while the anguish in my heart rose suddenly like a wild beast to my throat.

"What can I do, Sally?" I asked passionately. "What can I do?"

"Nothing, dear, nothing. Only be quiet."

Only be quiet! Rising to my feet I walked softly

to the end of the room, and then turning came back again to the spot where I had knelt. At the moment I longed to knock down something, to strangle something, to pull to earth and destroy as a beast destroys in a rage. Through the open window I could see a full moon shining over a magnolia, and the very softness and quiet of the moonlight appeared, in some strange way, to increase my suffering. A faint breeze, scented with jessamine, blew every now and then from the garden, rising, dying away, and rising again, until it waved the loosened tendrils of hair on Sally's neck. The odour, also, like the moonlight, mingled, while I stood there, and was made one with the anguish in my thoughts. Again I walked the length of the room, and again I turned and came back to the window beside which Sally sat. My foot as I moved stumbled upon something soft and round, and stooping to pick it up, I saw that it was a rubber doll, dropped by little Benjamin when he had grown too ill or too tired to play. I laid it in Sally's work-basket on the table, and then throwing off my coat, flung myself into a chair in one corner. A minute afterwards I rose, and walking gently through the long window, looked on the garden, which lay dim and fragrant under the moonlight. On the porch, twining in and out of the columns, the star jessamine, riotous with its second blooming, swayed back and forth like a curtain; and as I bent over, the small, white, deadly sweet blossoms caressed my face. A white moth whirred by me into the room, and when I entered again, I saw that it was flying swiftly in circles, above the flame of the night-lamp on the bureau.

Sally was sitting just as I had left her, her arm under

the child's head, her face bent forward as if listening to a distant, almost inaudible sound. She appeared so still, so patient, that I wondered in amazement if she had sat there for hours, unchanged, unheeding, unapproachable? There was in her attitude, in her pensive quiet, something so detached and tragic, that I felt suddenly that I had never really seen her until that minute; and instead of going to her as I had intended, I drew away, and stood on the threshold watching her almost as a stranger might have done. Once the child stirred and cried, lifting his little hands and letting them fall again with the same short cry of distress. The flesh of my heart seemed to tear suddenly asunder, and I sprang forward. Sally looked up at me, shook her head with a slow, quiet movement, and I stopped short as if rooted there by the single step I had taken. After ten years I remember every detail, every glimmer of light, every fitful rise and fall of the breeze, as if, not visual objects only, but scents, sounds, and movements, were photographed indelibly on my brain. I know that the white moth fluttered about my head, and that raising my hand, I caught it in my palm, which closed over it with violence. Then the cry from little Benjamin came again, and opening my palm, I watched the white moth fall dead, with crushed wings, to the floor. When I forget all else in my life, I shall still see Sally sitting motionless, like a painted figure, in the faint, reddish glow of the night-lamp, while above her, and above the little waxen face on her knee, the shadow of the palm-leaf fan, waved by Aunt Euphronasia, flitted to and fro like the wing of a bat.

At midnight the doctor came, and when he left, I followed him to the front steps.

"I'll come again at dawn," he said, "and in the meantime look out for your wife. She's been strained to the point of breaking."

"You think, then, that the child is — is hopeless?"

"Not hopeless, but very serious. I'll be back in a few hours. If there's a change, send for me, and remember, as I said, look out for your wife."

I went indoors, found some port wine left in Miss Mitty's bottles, poured out a glass, and carried it to her.

"Drink this, darling," I said.

As I held it to her lips, she swallowed it obediently, and then, looking up, she thanked me with her unfailing smile.

'Oh, we'll drink outer de healin' fountain, by en bye, lil' chillun,"

crooned Aunt Euphronasia softly, and the tune has rung ever afterwards somewhere in my brain. To escape from it at the time, I went out upon the front steps, closed the door, and walked, restless as a caged tiger, up and down the deserted pavement. A homeless dog or two, panting from thirst, lay in the gutter; otherwise there was not a sound, not a living thing, from end to end of the long dusty street.

For two hours I walked up and down there, entering the house from time to time to see if Sally needed me, or if she had moved. Then, as the light broke feebly, the doctor came, and we went in together. Sally was still sitting there, as she had sat all night, rigid in the

dim glow of the lamp, and over her Aunt Euphronasia still waved the palm-leaf fan with its black, flitting shadow. Then, as we crossed the threshold, there was a sudden sharp cry, and when I sprang forward and caught them both in my arms, I found that Sally had fainted and the child was dead on her knees.

We buried the child in the old Bland section at Hollywood, where a single twisted yew-tree grew between the graves, obliterated by ivy, of Edmond Bland and his wife, Caroline Matilda, born Fairfax. On the way home Sally sat rigid and tearless, with her hand in mine, and her eyes fixed on the drawn blinds of the carriage, as though she were staring intently through the closed window at something that fascinated and held her gaze in the dusty street.

"Does your head ache, darling?" I asked once, and she made a quick, half-impatient gesture of denial, with that strained, rapt look, as if she were seeing a vision, still in her face. Only when we reached home, and Aunt Euphronasia met her with outstretched arms on the threshold, did this agonised composure break down in passionate weeping on the old negress's shoulder.

The strength which had upheld her so long seemed suddenly to have departed, and all night she wept on my breast, while I fanned her in the hot air, which had grown humid and close. Not until the dawn had broken did my arm drop powerless with sleep, and the fan fell on the pillow. Then I slept for an hour, worn out with grief and exhaustion, and when presently I awoke with a start, I saw that she had left my side, and that her muslin dressing-gown was missing from

the chintz-covered chair where it had lain. When I called her in alarm, she came through the doorway that led to the kitchen, freshly dressed, with a coffee-pot in her hand.

"For God's sake, Sally," I implored, "don't make coffee for me!"

"I've made it, dear," she answered. "I couldn't let you go out without a mouthful to eat. You did not sleep a wink."

"And you?" I demanded.

"I didn't sleep either, but then I can rest all day." Her lip trembled and she pressed her teeth into it. "By the time you are dressed, Ben, breakfast will be ready."

Her eyes were red and swollen, her mouth pale and tremulous, all her radiant energy seemed beaten out of her; yet she spoke almost cheerfully, and there was none of the slovenliness of sorrow in her fresh and charming appearance. I dressed quickly, and going into the sitting-room, drank the coffee she had made because I knew it would please her. When it was time for me to start, she went with me to the door, and turning midway of the block, I saw her standing on the steps, smiling after me, with the sun in her eyes, like the ghost of herself as she had stood and smiled the morning after my failure. In the evening I found her paler, thinner, more than ever like the wan shadow of herself, yet meeting me with the same brave cheerfulness with which she had sent me forth. Could I ever repay her? I asked myself passionately, could I ever forget?

The dreary summer weeks dragged by like an eter-

nity; the autumn came and passed, and at the first of the year I was sent down, with a salary of ten thousand dollars, to build up traffic on the Tennessee and Carolina Railroad, which the Great South Midland and Atlantic had absorbed. Sally went with me, but she was so languid and ill that the change, instead of invigorating her, appeared to exhaust her remaining vitality. She lived only when I was with her, and when I came in unexpectedly, as I did sometimes, I would find her lying so still and cold on the couch that I would gather her to me in a passion of fear lest she should elude the lighter grasp with which I had held her. Never, not even in her girlhood, had I loved her with the intensity, the violence, of those months when I hardly dared clasp her to me in my terror that she might dissolve and vanish from my embrace. Then, at last, when the spring came, and the woods were filled with flowering dogwood and red-bud, she seemed to revive a little, to bloom softly again, like a flower that opens the sweeter and fresher after the storm.

"Is it the mild air, or the spring flowers?" I asked one afternoon, as we drove through the Southern woods, along a narrow deserted road that smelt of the budding pines.

"Neither, Ben, it is you," she replied. "I have had you all these months. Without that I could not have lived."

"You have had me," I answered, "ever since the first minute I saw your face. You have had me always."

"Not always. During those years of your great success I thought I had lost you."

"How could you, Sally, when it was all for you, and you knew it?"

"It may have been for me in the beginning, but success, when it came, crowded me out. It left me no room. That's why I didn't really mind the failure, dear, and the poverty — that's why I don't now really mind this burden of debt. Success took you away from me, failure brings you the closer. And when you go from me, Ben, there's something in me, I don't know what — something, like Aunt Matoaca in my blood — that rises up and rebels. If things had gone on like that, if you hadn't come back, I should have grown hard and indifferent. I should have found some other interest."

"Some other interest?" I repeated, while my heart throbbed as if a spasm of memory contracted it.

"Oh, of course, I don't know now just what I mean — but when I look back, I realise that I couldn't have stood many years like that with nothing to fill them. I'd have done something desperate, if it was only going over gates after Bonny. There's one thing they taught me, though, Ben," she added, "and that is that poor Aunt Matoaca was right."

"Right in what, Sally?"

"Right in believing that women must have larger lives — that they mustn't be expected to feed always upon their hearts. You tell them to let love fill their lives, and then when the lives are swept bare and clean of everything else, in place of love you leave mere vacancy — just mere vacancy and nothing but that. How can they fill their lives with love when love isn't

there — when it's off in the stock market or the railroad, or wherever its practical affairs may be?"

"But it comes back in the evening."

"Yes, it comes back in the evening and falls asleep over its cigar."

"Well, you've got me now," I responded cheerfully, "there's no doubt of that, you've got me now."

"That's why I'm getting well. How delicious the pines are! and look at the red-bud flowering there over the fence! It may be wicked of me, but, do you know — I've never been really able to regret that you lost your money."

"It is rather wicked, dear, to rejoice in my misery."

"I didn't say I 'rejoiced' — only that I couldn't regret. How can I regret it when the money came so between us?"

"But it didn't, Sally, if you could only understand! I loved you just as much all that time as I do now."

"But how was I to be sure, when you didn't want to be with me?"

"I did want to be with you — only there was always something else that had to be done."

"And the something else came always before me. But my life, you see, was swept bare and clean of everything except you."

"I had to work, Sally, I had to follow my ambition."

"You work now, but it is different. I don't mind this because it isn't working with madness. Just as you felt that you wanted your ambition, Ben, I felt that I wanted love. I was made so, I can't help it. Like Aunt Matoaca, my life has been swept and gar-

nished for that one guest, and if it were ever to fail me, I'd — I'd go wild like Aunt Matoaca, I suppose."

A red bird flew out of the pines across the road, and lifting her eyes, she followed its flight with a look in which there was a curious blending of sadness with passion. The truth of her words came home to me, with a quiver of apprehension, while I looked at her face, and by some curious freak of memory there flashed before me the image of George Bolingbroke as he had bent over to lay the blossom of sweet alyssum beside her plate. In all those months George, not I, had been there, I remembered, and some fierce resentment, which was half jealousy, half remorse, made me answer her almost with violence as my arm went about her.

"But you had the big things always, and it is the big things that count in the end."

"Yes, the big things count in the end. I used to tell myself that when you forgot all the anniversaries. You remember them now."

"I have time to think now, then I hadn't." As I uttered the words I was conscious of a sudden depression, of a poignant realisation of what this "time to think" signified in my life. The smart of my failure was still there, and I had known hours of late when my balked ambition was like a wild thing crying for freedom within me. The old lust of power, the passion for supremacy, still haunted my dreams, or came back to me at moments like this, when I drove with Sally through the restless pines, and smelt those vague, sweet scents of the spring, which stirred something primitive and male in my heart. The fighter and the

dreamer, having fought out their racial battle to a finish, were now merged into one.

We drove home slowly, the lights of the little Southern village shining brightly through a cloudless atmosphere ahead — and the lights, like the spring scents and the restless soughing of the pines, deepened the sense of failure, of incompleteness, from which I suffered. My career showed to me as suddenly cut off and broken, like a road the making of which has stopped short halfway up a hill. Did she discern this restlessness in me, I wondered, this ceaseless ache which resembled the ache of muscles that have been long unused?

After this the months slipped quietly by, one placid week succeeding another in a serene and cloudless monotony. Sally had few friends, there were no women of her own social position in the place; yet she was never lonely, never bored, never in search of distraction.

"I love it here, Ben," she said once, "it is so peaceful, just you and I."

"You'd tire of it before long, and you'll be glad enough to go back to Richmond when next spring comes."

At the time she did not protest, but when the following spring began to unfold, and we prepared to return to Virginia in May, there was something pensive and wistful in her parting from the little village and from the people who had been kind to her in the year she had spent there. We had taken several rooms in the house of Dr. Theophilus, who was supported in his prodigality in roses only by the strenuous pickling

and preserving of Mrs. Clay; and as we drove, on a warm May afternoon, up the familiar street from the station, I tried in vain to arouse in her some of the interest, the animation, that she had lost.

"You'll be glad to see the doctor and Bonny and George," I said.

"Yes, I'll be glad to see the doctor and Bonny and George. There is the house now, and look, the doctor is in his garden."

He had seen us before she spoke, for glancing up meditatively from working a bed of bleeding hearts near the gate, his dim old eyes, over their lowered spectacles, had been attracted to the approaching carriage. Rising to his feet, he came rapidly to the pavement, his trowel still in hand, his outstretched arms trembling with pleasure.

"Well, well, so here you are. It's good to see you. Tina, they have come sooner than we expected them. Moses" (to a little negro, who appeared from behind the currant bushes, where he had been digging), "take the bags upstairs to the front rooms and tell your Miss Tina that they have come sooner than we expected them."

As Moses darted off on his errand, in which he was assisted by the negro coachman, Dr. Theophilus led us back into the garden, and placed Sally in a low canvas chair, which he had brought from the porch to a shady spot between a gorgeous giant of battle rose-bush and a bed of bleeding hearts in full bloom.

"Come and sit down, my dear, come and sit down," he repeated, fussing about her. "Tina will give you a cup of tea out here before you go to your rooms, and

Ben and I will take our juleps before supper. I've been working in my garden, you see; there's nothing so satisfying in old age as a taste for flowers. It's more absorbing than chess, as I tell George — old George, I mean — and it's more soothing than children. Were you far enough South, my dear, to see the yellow jessamine grow wild? They tell me, too, that the Marshal Niel rose runs there up to the roofs of the houses. With us it is a very delicate rose. I have never been able to do anything with it, — but I have had a great success this year with my bleeding hearts, you will notice. Ah, there's Tina! So you see, Tina, here they are. They came sooner than we expected."

From the low white porch, under a bower of honeysuckle, Mrs. Clay appeared, with a cup of tea and a silver basket of sponge snowballs which she placed before Sally on a small green table; and immediately a troop of slate-coloured pigeons fluttered from the mimosa tree and the clipped yew at the end of the garden, and began pecking greedily in the gravelled walk.

"I'm glad you've come, my dears," remarked the old lady in her brusque, honest manner, "and I hope to heaven that you will be able to take Theophilus's mind off his flowers. I declare he has grown so besotted about them that I believe he'd sell the very clothes off his back to buy a new variety of rose or lily. Only a week ago he took back a dozen socks I had given him because he said he'd rather have the money to spend in a strange kind of iris he'd just heard of."

"A most remarkable plant," observed the doctor, with enthusiasm, "the peculiarity of which is that it is smaller and less attractive to the vulgar eye than the

common iris, of which I have a great number growing at the end of the garden. Don't listen to Tina, my children, she's a cynic, and no cynic can understand the philosophy of gardening. It was one of the wisest of men, though a trifle unorthodox, I admit, who advised us to cultivate our garden. A pessimist he may have been before he took up the trowel, but a cynic — never."

"I am not complaining of the trowel, Theophilus,' observed Mrs. Clay, "though when it comes to that I don't see why a trowel and a bed of roses is any more philosophic than a ladle and a kettle of pickles."

"Perhaps not, Tina, perhaps not," chuckled the doctor, "but yours is a practical mind, and there's nothing, I've always said, like a practical mind for seeing things crooked. It suits a crooked world, I suppose, and that's why it usually manages to get on so well in it."

"And I'd like to know how you see things, Theophilus," sniffed Mrs. Clay, whose temper was rising.

"I see them as they are, Tina, which isn't in the very least as they appear," rejoined the good man, unruffled.

He bent forward, made a lunge with his trowel at a solitary blade of grass growing in the bed of bleeding hearts, and after uprooting it, returned with a tranquil face to his garden chair.

But Mrs. Clay, having, as he had said, a practical mind, merely sniffed while she wiped off the small green table with a red-bordered napkin and scattered the crumbs of sponge-cake to the greedy slate-coloured pigeons.

"If I judged you by what you appear, Theophilus," she retorted, crushingly, "I should have judged you for a fool on the day you were born."

This sally, which was delivered with spirit, afforded the doctor an evident relish.

"If you knew your Juvenal, my dear," he responded, with perfect good humour, "you would remember: *Fronti nulla fides.*"

Rising from his seat, he stooped fondly over the bed of bleeding hearts, and gathering a few blossoms, presented them to Sally, with a courtly bow.

"A favourite flower of mine. My poor mother was always very partial to it," he remarked.

CHAPTER XXXII

I COME TO THE SURFACE

It was a bright June day, I remember, when I came to the surface again, and saw clear sky for the first time for more than two years. I had entered the office a little late, and the General had greeted me with an outstretched hand in which I felt the grip of the bones through the flabby flesh.

"Look here, Ben, have you kept control of the West Virginia and Wyanoke?" he enquired, and I saw the pupils of his eyes contract to fine points of steel, as they did when he meant business.

"Nobody wanted it, General. I still own control — or rather I still practically own the road."

"Well, take my advice and don't sell to the first man that asks you, even if he comes from the South Midland. I've just heard that they've been tapping those undeveloped coal fields at Wyanoke, and I shouldn't be surprised if they turned out, after all, to be the richest in West Virginia."

It was then that I saw clear sky.

"I'll hold on, General, as long as you say," I replied. "Meanwhile, I'll run out there and have a look."

"Oh, have a look by all means. I say, Ben," he added after a minute, with a worried expression in his face, "have you heard about the trouble that old fool Theophilus has been getting into? Mark my words,

before he dies, he'll land his sister in the poorhouse, as sure as I sit here. Garden needed moisture, he said, couldn't raise some of those scraggy, new-fangled things that nobody can pronounce the names of except himself, so he went to work and had pipes laid from one end to the other. When the bill came in there was no way to pay it except by mortgaging his house, so he's gone and mortgaged it. Mrs. Clay, poor lady, came to me on the point of tears — she'll be in the poorhouse yet, I was obliged to tell her so — and entreated me to make an effort to restrain Theophilus. 'I try to keep the catalogues from reaching him,' she said, 'but sometimes the postman slips in without my seeing him, and then he's sure to deliver one. Whenever Theophilus reads about any strange specimen, or any hybridising nonsense that nobody heard of when I was young, he seems to go completely out of his head, and the worst of 'em is,' she added," concluded the General, chuckling under his breath, "'there isn't a single pretty, sweet-smelling flower in the lot.'"

"I'm awfully sorry about the house, General. Isn't there some way of curbing him?"

"I never saw the bit yet that could curb an old fool," replied the great man, indignantly; "the next thing his roof will be sold over his head, and they'll go to the poorhouse, that's what I told Mrs. Clay. Poor lady, she was really in a terrible state of mind."

"Surely you won't let it come to that. Wait till these dreamed-of coal fields materialise and I'll take over that mortgage."

The General's lower lip shot out with a sulky and forbidding expression.

"The best thing that could happen to the old fool would be to have his house sold above him, and by Jove, if he doesn't cease his extravagance, I'll stand off and let them do it as sure as my name is George Bolingbroke. What Theophilus needs," he concluded angrily, "is discipline."

"It's too late to begin to discipline a man of over eighty."

"No, it ain't," retorted the General; "it's never too late. If it doesn't do him any good in this world, it will be sure to benefit him in the next. He's entirely too opinionated, that's the trouble with him. Do you remember the way he sat up over there on Church Hill, and tried to beat me down that Robert Carrington lived in Bushrod's house, and that he'd attended him there in his last illness? As if I didn't know Bushrod Carrington as well as my own brother. Got all his clothes in Paris. Can see him now as he used to come to church in one of his waistcoats of peachblow brocade. Yet you heard Theophilus stick out against me. Wouldn't give in even when I offered to take him straight to Bushrod's grave in Saint John's Churchyard, where I had helped to lay him. That's at the back of the whole thing, I tell you. If Theophilus had had a little discipline, this would never have happened."

"All the same I hope you won't let it come to a sale," I responded, as a bunch of telegrams was brought to him, and we settled down to our morning's work.

In the afternoon when I went back to the doctor's, I found Sally in the low canvas chair between the giant-of-battle rose-bush and the bleeding hearts, with George Bolingbroke on the ground at her feet, reading to her,

I noticed at a glance, out of a book of poems. George hated poetry — I had never forgotten his contemptuous boyish attitude toward Latin — and the sight of him stretched there, his handsome figure at full length, his impassive face flushed with a fine colour, produced in me a curious irritation, which sounded in my voice when I spoke.

"I thought you scorned literature, George. Are you acting the part of a gay deceiver?"

"Oh, it goes well on a day like this," he rejoined in his amiable drawling manner; "the doctor has been quoting his favourite verse of Horace to us. He has had trouble with his hybridising or something, so he tells us — what is it, doctor? I'm no good at Latin."

Dr. Theophilus, who was planting oysters at the roots of a calla lily, having discovered, as he repeatedly informed us, that such treatment increased the number and size of the blossoms, raised his fine old head, and stood up after wiping his trowel on the trimly mown grass in the border.

"*Aequam memento rebus in arduis servare mentem*," he replied, rolling the Latin words luxuriously on his tongue, as if he relished the flavour. "That verse of the poet has sustained me in many and varied afflictions. Not to know it is to dispense with an unfailing source of consolation in trouble. When using it at a patient's bedside, I have found that it invariably acted as a sedative to an excited mind. I sometimes think," he added gently, "that if Tina had not been ignorant of Latin, she would have had a — a less practical temper."

Picking up the trowel, which he had laid on the grass,

he returned with a calm soul to his difficulties, while Sally, looking up at me with anxious eyes, said:—

"Something has happened, Ben. What is it?"

I broke into a laugh. "Only that that little dead-beat road in West Virginia may restore my fortune, after all," I replied.

The next day I went to Wyanoke and reorganised the affairs of the little road. Shortly afterwards orders for freight cars came in faster than we were able to supply them, and we called at once on the cars of the Great South Midland and Atlantic.

"If you weren't a friend, this would be a mighty good chance to squeeze you," remarked the General; "we could keep your cars back until we'd clean squelched your traffic, and then buy the little road up for a song. It's business, but it isn't fair, and I'll be blamed if I'm going to squelch a friend."

He did not squelch us, being as good as his word; the undeveloped coal fields developed amazingly and the result was that before the year was over, I had sold the little road at my own price to the big one. Then I stood up and drew breath, like a man released from the weight of irons.

"We can go into our own home," I said joyfully to Sally. "In a year or two, if all goes well, and I work hard, we'll be back again where we were."

"Where we were?" she repeated, and there was, I thought, a listless note in her voice.

"Doesn't it make you happy?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm glad, glad the debt is gone, and now you'll look young and splendid again, won't you?"

"I'll try hard if you want me to."

"I do want you to," she answered, looking up at me with a smile.

The window was open, and a flood of sunshine fell on her pale brown hair, as it rested against the high arm of a chintz-covered sofa. Her hand, small and child-like, though less round and soft than it had been two years ago, caressed my cheek when I bent over her. She was well again, she was blooming, but the bloom was paler and more delicate, and there was a fragility in her appearance which was a new and disturbing sign of diminished strength. Would she ever, even when cradled in luxuries, recover her buoyant health, her sparkling vitality, I wondered.

The old Bland house, with the two great sycamores growing beside it, was for sale; and thinking to please Sally, I bought it without her knowledge, filled, as it was, with the Bland and Fairfax furniture, which had surrounded Miss Mitty and Miss Matoaca. On the day some eight or nine months later that we moved into it the sycamores were budding, and there were faint spring scents in the air.

"This is where you belong. This is home to you," I said as we stood on the wide porch at the back, and looked down on the garden. "You will be happy here, dearest."

"Oh, yes, I'll be happy here."

"It won't be so hard for you when I'm obliged to leave you alone. I'm sorry I've had to be away so much of late. Have you been lonely?"

"I've taken up riding again. George has found me a new horse, a beauty. To-morrow I shall follow the hounds with Bonny."

"Oh, be careful, Sally, promise me that you will be careful."

She turned with a laugh that sounded a little reckless.

"There's no pleasure in being careful, and I'm seeking pleasure," she answered.

The next morning I went to New York for a couple of days, and when I returned late one afternoon, I found Sally, in her riding habit, pouring tea for Bonny Marshall and George Bolingbroke in the drawing-room.

I was very tired, my mind was engrossed in business, as it had been engrossed since the day of the sale of the West Virginia and Wyanoke Railroad, and I was about to pass upstairs to my dressing-room, when George, catching sight of me, called to me to come in and exert my powers of persuasion.

"I'm begging Sally to sell that horse, Beauchamp," he said. "She tried to make him take a fence this afternoon and he balked and threw her. At first we were frightened out of our wits, but she got up laughing and insisted upon mounting him again on the spot."

"Of course you didn't let her," I retorted, with anger.

"Let her? Great Scott! have you been married to a Bland for nearly eight years and are you still saying, 'let her'?"

"I mounted and rode on with the hunt," said Sally, looking at me with shining eyes in which there was a defiant and reckless expression. "He got quite away with me, but I held on and came in at the death, though without a hat. Now my arms are so sore I shall hardly be able to do my hair."

"Of course you're not to ride that horse again,

Sally," I responded sternly, forgetting my dusty clothes, forgetting Bonny's dancing black eyes that never left my face while I stood there.

"Of course I am, Ben," rejoined Sally, laughing, while a high colour rose to her forehead. "Of course I'm going to ride him to-morrow afternoon when I go out with Bonny."

"Ah, don't, please," entreated Bonny, in evident distress; "he's really an ugly brute, you know, dear, if he is so beautiful."

"I feel awfully mean about it, Ben," said George, "because, you see, I got him for her."

"And you got him," I retorted, indignantly, "without knowing evidently a thing about him."

"One can never know anything about a brute like that. He went like a lamb as long as I was on him, but the trouble is that Sally has too light a hand."

"He'd be all right with me," remarked Bonny, stretching out her arm, in which the muscle was hard as steel. "See what a grip I have."

"I'll never give up, I'll never give up," said Sally, and though she uttered the words with gaiety, the expression of defiance, of recklessness, was still in her eyes.

When George and Bonny had gone, I tried in vain to shake this resolve, which had in it something of the gentle, yet unconquerable, obstinacy of Miss Matoaca.

"Promise me, Sally, that you will not attempt to ride that horse again," I entreated.

Turning from me, she walked slowly to the end of the room and bent over the box of sweet alyssum, which still blossomed under a canary cage on the

window-sill. A cedar log was burning on the andirons, and the red light of the flames fell on the tapestried furniture, on the quaint inlaid spinet in one corner, and on the portrait above it of Miss Mitty and Miss Matoaca clasping hands under a garland of roses.

"Will you promise me, dearest?" I asked again, for she did not answer.

Lifting her head from the flowers, she stood with her hand on one of the delicate curtains, and her figure, in its straight black habit, drawn very erect.

"I'll ride him," she responded quietly, "if — if he kills me."

"But why — why — what on earth is the use of taking so great a risk?" I demanded.

A humorous expression shot into her face, and I saw her full, red lips grow tremulous with laughter.

"That," she answered, after a moment, "is my ambition. All of us have an ambition, you know, women as well as men."

"An ambition?" I repeated, and looked in mystification at the portrait above the spinet.

"It sounds strange to you," she went on, "but why shouldn't I have one? I was a very promising horsewoman before my marriage, and my ambition now is to — to go after Bonny. Only Bonny says I can't," she added regretfully, "because of my hands."

"They are too small?"

"Too small and too light. They can't hold things."

"Well, they've managed to hold one at any rate," I responded gaily, though I added seriously the minute afterward, "If you'll let me sell that horse, darling, I'll give you anything on God's earth that you want."

"But suppose I don't want anything on God's earth except that horse?"

"There's no sense in that," I blurted out, in bewilderment. "What in thunder is there about the brute that has so taken your fancy?"

Her hand fell from the curtain, and plucking a single blossom of sweet alyssum, she came back to the hearth holding it to her lips.

"He has taken my fancy," she replied, "because he is exciting — and I am craving excitement."

"But you never used to want excitement."

"People change, all the poets and philosophers tell us. I've wanted it very badly indeed for the last six or eight months."

"Just since we've recovered our money?"

"Well, one can't have excitement without money, can one? It costs a good deal. Beauchamp sold for sixteen hundred dollars."

"He'd sell for sixteen to-morrow if I had my way."

"But you haven't. He's the only excitement I have and I mean to keep him. I shall go out again with the hounds on Saturday."

"If you do, you'll make me miserable, Sally. I shan't be able to do a stroke of work."

"Then you'll be very foolish, Ben," she responded, and when I would have still pressed the point, she ran out of the room with the remark that she must have a hot bath before dinner. "If I don't I'll be too stiff to mount," she called back defiantly as she went up the staircase.

All night I worried over the supremacy of Beauchamp, but on the morrow she was kept in bed by the

results of her fall, and before she was up again, George had spirited the horse off somewhere to a farm in the country.

"I'd have turned horse thief before I'd have let her get on him again," he said. "I bought the brute, so I had the best right to dispose of him as I wanted to."

"Well, I hope you'll do better next time," I returned. "Sally has got some absurd idea in her head about rivalling Bonny Marshall, but she never will because she isn't built that way."

"No, she isn't built that way," he agreed, "and I'm glad of it. When I want a boy I'd rather have him in breeches than in skirts. Is she out of bed yet?"

"She was up this morning, and on the point of telephoning to the stables when I left the house."

He laughed softly. "Well, my word goes at the stables," he rejoined, "so you needn't worry. I'll not let any harm come to her."

The tone in which he spoke, pleasant as it was, wounded my pride of possession in some inexplicable manner. Sally was safe! It was all taken out of my hands, and the only thing that remained for me was to return with a tranquil mind to my affairs. In spite of myself this constant beneficent intervention of George in my life fretted my temper. If he would only fail sometimes! If he would only make a mistake! If he would only attend to his own difficulties, and leave mine to go wrong if they pleased!

This was on my way up-town in the afternoon, and when I reached home, I found Sally lying on a couch in her upstairs sitting-room, with an uncut novel in her hands.

"Ben, did you sell Beauchamp?" she asked, as I entered, and her tone was full of suppressed resentment, of indignant surprise.

"I'm sorry to say I didn't, dear," I responded cheerfully, "for I should certainly have done so if George hadn't been too quick for me."

"It was George, then," she said, and her voice lost its resentment.

"Yes, it was George — everything is George," I retorted, in an irascible tone.

Her eyebrows arched, not playfully as they were used to do, but in surprise or perplexity.

"He has been very good to me all my life," she answered quietly.

"I know, I know," I said, repenting at once of my temper, "and if you want another horse, Sally, you shall have it — George will find you a gentle one this time."

She shook her head, smiling a little.

"I don't want a gentle one. I wanted Beauchamp, and since he has gone I don't think I care to ride any more. Bonny is right, I suppose, I could never keep up with her."

"Just as you like, sweetheart, but for my part, I feel easier, somehow, when you don't go out with the hounds. I'd rather you wouldn't do such rough riding."

"That's because like most men you have an ideal of a 'faire ladye,'" she answered, mockingly. "I'm not sure, however, that the huntress hasn't the best of it. What an empty existence the 'faire ladye' must have led!"

At first I thought her determination was uttered in jest, and would not endure through the night; but as the weeks and the months went by and she still refused to consider the purchase of the various horses George put through their paces before her, I realised that she really meant, as she had said, to give up her brief dream of excelling Bonny. Then, for a few months in the spring and summer, she turned to gardening with passion, and aided by Dr. Theophilus and George, she planted a cart-load of bulbs in our square of ground at the back. When I came up late now, I would find the three of them poring over flower catalogues, with gathered brows and thoughtful, enquiring faces.

"There's nothing like a love of the trowel for making friends," remarked the old man, one May afternoon, when I found them resting from their labours while they drank tea on the porch; "it's a pity you haven't time to take it up, Ben. Now, young George there has developed a most extraordinary talent for gardening that he never knew he possessed until I cultivated it. I shouldn't wonder if it took the place of the horse with him in the end. What do you say, Sally?" he added, turning to where Sally and George were leaning together over the railing, with their eyes on a bed of Oriental poppies. "I was telling Ben that I shouldn't wonder if George's taste for flowers would not finally triumph over his fancy for the horse."

For a minute Sally did not look round, and when at last she turned, her face wore a defiant and reckless expression, as it had done that afternoon when Beauchamp had thrown her.

"I'm not sure, doctor," she answered; "after all

flowers are tame sport, aren't they? And George is like me — what he wants is excitement."

"I'm sorry to hear that, my dear, a gentle and quiet pursuit is a source of happiness. You remember what Horace says —"

"Ah, I know, doctor, but did even Horace remember what he said while he was young?"

George was still gazing attentively down on the bed of Oriental poppies at the foot of the steps, and though he had taken no part in the conversation, something in his back, in the rigid look of his shoulders, as though his muscles were drawn and tense, made me say suddenly:

"If George has changed his hobby from horse-racing to flowers, I'll begin to expect the General to start collecting insects."

At this George wheeled squarely upon me, and in his dark, flushed face there was the set look of a man that has taken a high jump.

"It's a bad plan to pin all your pleasure on one thing, Ben," he said. "If you put all your eggs in one basket you're more than likely to stub your toe."

"Well, a good deal depends upon how wisely you may have chosen your pursuit," commented the doctor, pushing his spectacles away from his eyes to his hair, which was still thick and long; "I don't believe that a man can make a mistake in selecting either flowers or insects for his life's interest. The choice between the two is merely a question of temperament, I suppose, and though I myself confess to a leaning toward plants, I seriously considered once devoting my declining years to the study of the habits of beetles. Your sug-

gestion as to George, however, — old George, I am alluding to, — is a capital one, and I shall call his attention to it the next time I see him. He couldn't do better, I am persuaded, than bend his remaining energies in the direction of insects."

He paused to drink his tea, nodding gently over the rim of his cup to Bonny Marshall and Bessy Dandridge, who came through one of the long windows out upon the porch.

"So you've really stopped for a minute," remarked Bonny merrily, swinging her floating silk train as if it were the skirt of a riding habit, "and even Ben has fallen out of the race long enough to get a glimpse of his wife. Have stocks tripped him up again, poor fellow? Do you know, Sally, it's perfectly scandalous the way you are never seen in public together. At the reception at the Governor's the other night, one of those strange men from New York asked me if George were your husband. Now, that's what I call positively improper — I really felt the atmosphere of the divorce court around me when he said it — and my grandmama assures me that if such a thing had happened to *your* grandmama, Caroline Matilda Fairfax, she would never have held up her head again. 'But neither morals nor manners are what they were when Caroline Matilda and I were young,' she added regretfully, 'and it is due, I suppose, to the war and to the intrusion into society of all these new people that no one ever heard of.' When I mentioned the guests at the two last receptions I'd been to, if you will believe me, she had never heard of a single name, — 'all mushrooms,' she declared."

Her eyes, dancing roguishly, met mine over the tea-table, and a bright blush instantly overspread her face, as if a rose-coloured search-light had fallen on her.

The embarrassment which I always felt in her presence became suddenly as acute as physical soreness, and the blush in her face served only to illuminate her consciousness of my difference, of my roughness, of the fact that externally, at least, I had never managed to shake myself free from a resemblance to the market boy who had once brought his basket of potatoes to the door of this very house. The "magnificent animal," I knew, had never appealed to her except as it was represented in horse-flesh; and yet the "magnificent animal" was what in her eyes I must ever remain. I looked at George, leaning against a white column, and his appearance of perfect self-sufficiency, his air of needing nothing, changed my embarrassment into a smothered sensation of anger. And as in the old days of my first great success, this anger brought with it, through some curious association of impulses, a fierce, almost a frenzied, desire for achievement. Here, in the little world of tradition and sentiment, I might show still at a disadvantage, but outside, in the open, I could respond freely to the lust for power, to the passion for supremacy, which stirred my blood. Turning, with a muttered excuse about letters to read, I went into the house, and closed my study door behind me with a sense of returning to a friendly and familiar atmosphere.

Through the rest of the year Sally devoted herself with energy to the cultivation of flowers; but when the following spring opened, after a hard winter, she seemed

to have grown listless and indifferent, and when I spoke of the garden, she merely shook her head and pointed to an unworked border at the foot of the grey wall.

"I can't make anything grow, Ben. All those brown sticks down there are the only signs of the bulbs I set out last autumn with my own hands. Nothing comes up as it ought to."

"Perhaps you need pipes like the doctor," I suggested.

"Oh, no, that would uproot the old shrubs, and besides, I am tired of it, I think."

She was lying on the couch in her sitting-room, a pile of novels on a table beside her, and the delicacy in her appearance, the transparent fineness of her features, of her hands, awoke in me the feeling of anxiety I had felt so often during the year after little Benjamin's death.

"I'm sorry I can't get up to luncheon now, darling, but we are making a big railroad deal. What have you been doing all day long by yourself?"

She looked up at me, and I remembered the face of Miss Matoaca, as I had seen it against the red firelight on the afternoon when Sally and I had gone in to tell her of our engagement.

"I didn't go out," she answered. "It was raining so hard that I stayed by the fire."

"You've been lying here all day alone?"

"Bonny Page came in for a few minutes."

"Have you read?"

"No, I've been thinking."

"Thinking of what, sweetheart?"

"Oh, so many things. You've come up again, haven't you, Ben, splendidly! Luck is with you, the General says, and whatever you touch prospers."

"Yes, I've come up, but this is the crisis. If I slip now, if I make a false move, if I draw out, I'm as dead as a door-nail. But give me five or ten years of hard work and breathless thinking, and I'll be as big a man as the General."

"As the General?" she repeated gently, and played with the petals of an American Beauty rose on the table beside her.

"As soon as I'm secure, as soon as I can slacken work a bit, I'm going to cut all this and take you away. We'll have a second honeymoon when that time comes."

"In five or ten years?"

"Perhaps sooner. Meanwhile, isn't there something that I can do for you? Is there anything on God's earth that you want? Would you like a string of pearls?"

She shook her head with a laugh. "No, I don't want a string of pearls. Is it time now to dress for dinner?"

"Would you mind if I didn't change, dear? I'm so tired that I shall probably fall asleep over the dessert."

An evening or two later, when I came up after seven o'clock, I thought that she had been crying, and taking her in my arms, I passionately kissed the tear marks away.

"There's but one thing to do, Sally. You must go away. What do you say to Europe?"

"With you?"

"I wish to heaven it could be with me, but if I shirk this deal now, I'm done for, and if I stick it out, it may mean future millions. Why not ask Bessy Dandridge?"

"I don't think I want to go with Bessy Dandridge."

Her tone troubled me, it was so gentle, so reserved, and walking to the window, I stood gazing out upon the April rain that dripped softly through the budding sycamores. I felt that I ought to go, and yet I knew that unless I gave up my career, it was out of the question. The railroad deal was, as I had said, very important, and if I were to withdraw from it now, it would probably collapse and bring down on me the odium of my associates. After my desperate failure of less than five years ago, I was just recovering my ground, and the incidents of that disaster were still too recent to permit me to breathe freely. My name had suffered little because my personal tragedy had been regarded as a part of the general panic, and I had, in the words of George Bolingbroke, "gone to smashes with honour." Yet I was not secure now; I had not reached the top of the ladder, but was merely mounting. "It's for Sally's sake that I'm doing it," I said to myself, suddenly comforted by the reflection; "without Sally the whole thing might go to ruin and I wouldn't hold up my hand. But I must make her proud of me. I must justify her choice in the eyes of her friends." And the balm of this thought seemed to lighten my weight of trouble and to appease my conscience. "It isn't as if I were doing it for myself, or my own ambition. I am really doing it for her — everything is for her. If I can hold on now, in a few years I'll give

her millions to spend." Then I remembered that the last time I had gone motoring with her it had appeared to do her good, and that she had remarked she preferred a car with a red lining.

"I tell you what, sweetheart," I said, going back to her, "as I can't take you away, I'll buy you a new motor car with a red lining and I'll take you out every blessed afternoon I can get off from the office. You'll like that, won't you?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes, I'll like that," she replied, with an effort at animation, while she bent her face over the rose in her hand.

A week later I bought the motor car, the handsomest I could find, with the softest red lining; and when May came, I went out with her whenever I could break away from my work. But the pressure was great, the General was failing and leaned on me, and I was over head and ears in a dozen outside schemes that needed only my amazing energy to push them to success. Never had my financial insight appeared so infallible, never had my "genius" for affairs shone so brilliantly. The years of poverty had increased, not dissipated, my influence, and I had come up all the stronger for the experience that had sent me down. The lesson that a weaker man might have succumbed beneath, I had absorbed into myself, and was now making use of as I had made use of every incident, bad or good, in my life. I passed on, I accumulated, but I did not squander. Little things, as well as great things, served me for material, and during those first years of my recovery, I became by far the most brilliant figure in my world of finance. "Pile all the bu'sted

stocks in the market on his shoulders, and he'll still come out on top," chuckled the General. "The best thing that ever happened to you, Ben, barring the toting of potatoes, was the blow on the head that sent you under water. A little fellow would have drowned, but you knew how to float."

"I'd agree with you about its being the best thing, except — except for Sally."

"What's the matter with Sally? Is she going cracked? You know I always said she was the image of her aunt — Miss Matoaca Bland."

"She has never recovered. Her health seems to have given way."

"She needs coddling, that's the manner of women and babies. Do you coddle her? It's worth while, though some men don't know how to do it. Lord, Lord, I remember when my poor mother was on her death-bed and my father got on his knees and asked her if he'd been a good husband (she was his third wife and died of her tenth child), she looked at him with a kind of gentle resentment and replied: 'You were a saint, I suppose, Samuel, but I'd rather have had a sinner that would have coddled me.' She was the prim, flat-bosomed type, too, just like Miss Mitty Bland, and my father said afterwards, crying like a baby, that he had so much respect for her he would as soon have thought of trying to coddle a Lombardy poplar. Poplar or mimosa tree, I tell you, they are all made that way, every last one of them — and nothing on earth made poor Miss Matoaca a fire-eater and a disturber of the peace except that she didn't have a man to coddle her."

"I give Sally everything under heaven I can think of, but she doesn't appear to want it."

"Keep on giving, it's the only way. You'll see her begin to pick up presently before you know it. They ain't rational, my boy, that's the whole truth about 'em, they ain't rational. If Miss Matoaca had belonged to a rational sex, do you think she'd have killed herself trying to get on an equality with us? You can't make a pullet into a rooster by teaching it to crow, as my old mammy used to say." For a minute he was silent, and appeared to be meditating. "I tell you what I'll do, Ben," he said at last, with a flash of inspiration, "I'll go in with you and see if I can't cheer up Sally a bit."

When we reached my door, he let the reins fall over the back of his old horse, and getting out, hobbled, with my assistance, up-stairs, and into Sally's sitting-room, where we found George Bolingbroke, looking depressed and sullen.

She was charmingly dressed, as usual, and as the General entered, she came forward to meet him with the gracious manner which some one had told me was a part, not of her Bland, but of her Fairfax inheritance. "That's a pretty tea-gown you've got on," observed the great man, in the playful tone in which he might have remarked to a baby that it was wearing a beautiful bib. "You haven't been paying much attention to fripperies of late, Ben tells me. Have you seen any hats? I don't know anything better for a woman's low spirits, my dear, than a trip to New York to buy a hat."

She laughed merrily, while her eyes met George Bolingbroke's over the General's head.

"I bought six hats last month," she replied.

"And you didn't feel any better?"

"Not permanently. Then Ben got me a diamond bracelet." She held out her arm, with the bracelet on her wrist, which looked thin and transparent.

The General bent his bald head over the trinket, which he examined as attentively as if it had been a report of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad.

"Ben's got good taste," he observed; "that's a pretty bracelet."

"Yes, it's a pretty bracelet."

"But that didn't make you feel any brighter?"

"Oh, I'm well," she responded, laughing. "I've just been telling George I'm so well I'm going to a ball with him."

"To a ball," I said; "are you strong enough for that, Sally?"

"I'm quite strong, I'm well, I feel wildly gay."

"It's the best thing for her," remarked the General. "Don't stop her, Ben, let her go."

At dinner that night, in a gorgeous lace gown, with pearls on her throat and in her hair, she was cheerful, animated, almost, as she had said, wildly gay. When George came for her, I put her into the carriage.

"Are you all right?" I asked anxiously. "Are you sure you are strong enough, Sally?"

"Quite strong. What will you do, Ben?"

"I've got to work. There are some papers to draw up. Don't let her stay late, George."

"Oh, I'll take care of her," said George. "Good-night."

She leaned out, touching my hand. "You'll be in bed when I come back. Good-night."

The carriage rolled off, and entering the house I went into the library, where I worked until twelve o'clock. Then as Sally had not returned and I had a hard day ahead of me, I went upstairs to bed.

She did not wake me when she came in, and in the morning I found her sleeping quietly, with her cheek pillowed on her open palm, and a pensive smile on her lips. After breakfast, when I came up to speak to her before going out, she was sitting up in bed, in a jacket of blue satin and a lace cap, drinking her coffee.

"Did you have a good time?" I asked, kissing her. "Already you look better."

"I danced ever so many dances. Do you know, Ben, I believe it was diversion I needed. I've thought too much and I'm going to stop."

"That's right, dance on if it helps you."

"I can't get that year on Church Hill out of my mind."

"Forget it, sweetheart, it's over; forget it."

"Yes, it's over," she repeated, and then as she lay back, in her blue satin jacket, on the embroidered pillows and smiled up at me, I saw in her face a reflection of the faint wonder which was the inherited look of the Blands in regarding life.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE GROWING DISTANCE

THE memory of this look was with me as I went, a little later, down the block to the car line, but meeting the General at the corner, all other matters were crowded out of my mind by the gravity of the news he leaned out of his buggy to impart.

"Well, it's come at last, Ben, just as I said it would," he remarked cheerfully; "Theophilus is to be sold out at four o'clock this afternoon."

"I'd forgotten all about it, General, but do you really mean you will let it come to a public auction?"

"It's the only way on God's earth to stop his extravagance. Of course I'm going to buy the house in at the end. I've given the agent orders. Theophilus ain't going to suffer, but he's got to have a lesson and I'm the only one who can teach it. A little judicious discipline right now will make him a better and a happier man for the remainder of his life. He's too opinionated, that's the trouble with him and always has been. He's got some absurd idea in his head now that I ought to quit the railroad and begin watching insects. Actually brought me a microscope and some ants in a little box that he had had sent all the way from California. Wanted me to build 'em a glass house in my garden, and spend my time looking at 'em. 'Look

here, Theophilus,' I said, 'I haven't come to my dotage yet, and when I get there, I'm going to take up something a little bigger than an insect. From a railroad to an ant is too long a jump."

"But this auction, General, I'm very much worried about it. You know I'd always intended to take over that mortgage, but, to tell the truth, it escaped my memory."

"Oh, leave that to me, leave that to me," responded the great man serenely. "Theophilus ain't going to suffer, but a little discipline won't do him any harm."

His plan was well laid, I saw, but the best-laid plans, as the great man himself might have informed me, are not always those that are destined to reach maturity. When I had parted from him, I fell, almost unconsciously, to scheming on my own account, and the result was that before going into my office, I looked up the real estate agent who had charge of the auction, and took over the mortgage which too great an indulgence in roses had forced upon Dr. Theophilus. In my luncheon hour I rushed up to the house, where I found Mrs. Clay, with a big wooden ladle in her hand, wandering distractedly between the outside kitchen and the little garden, where the doctor was placidly spraying his roses with a solution of kerosene oil.

"I knew it would come," said the poor lady, in tears; "no amount of preserves and pickles could support the extravagance of Theophilus. More than two years ago George Bolingbroke warned me that I should end my days in the poorhouse, and it has come at last. As for Theophilus, even the thought of the poorhouse does not appear to disturb him. He does nothing but walk

around and repeat some foolish Latin verse about Æquam — æquam — until I am sick of the very sound — "

When I explained to her that the auction would be postponed, at least for another century, she recovered her temper and her spirit, and observed emphatically that she hoped the lesson would do Theophilus good.

"May I go out to him now?"

"Oh, yes, you'll find him somewhere in the garden. He has just been in with a watering-pot to ask for kerosene oil."

In the centre of the gravelled walk, between the shining rows of oyster shells, the doctor stood energetically spraying his roses. At the sound of my step he looked round with a tranquil face, his long white hair blowing in the breeze above his spectacles, which he wore, as usual when he was not reading, pushed up on his forehead.

"Ah, Ben, you find us afflicted, but not despondent," he observed. "Now is the time, as I just remarked to Tina a minute ago, to prove the unfailing support of a knowledge of Latin and of the poet Horace. *Æquam memento* — "

"I'm afraid, doctor, I haven't time for Horace," I returned, ruthlessly cutting short his enjoyment, while the sonorous sentence still rolled in his mouth; "but I've attended to this affair of the mortgage, and you shan't be bothered again. Why on earth didn't you come to me sooner about it?"

Bending over, he plucked a rosebud with a canker at the heart, and stood meditatively surveying it. "An Anna von Diesbach," he observed, "and when

perfect a most beautiful rose. The truth was, my boy, that I felt a delicacy about approaching my friends in the hour of my misfortunes. Old George I did go to in my extremity, but I fear, Ben, — I seriously fear that I have estranged old George by making him a present of a little box of ants. He imagines, I fancy, that I intended a reflection upon his intelligence. Because the ant is small, he concludes, unreasonably, that it is unworthy. On the contrary, as I endeavoured to convince him, it possesses a degree of sagacity and foresight the human being might well envy — "

"I can't stop now, doctor, I'm in too great a rush, but remember, if you ever have a few hundred dollars you'd like me to turn over for you, I'm at your service. At all events, preserve your calm soul and leave me to contend with your difficulties —"

"The word 'preserve,' " commented the doctor, "though used in a different and less practical sense, reminds me of Tina. She has sacrificed her peace of mind to preserves, as I told her this morning. Even I should find it impossible to maintain an equable character, if I lived in the atmosphere of a stove and devoted my energies to a kettle. One's occupation has, without doubt, a marked influence upon one's attitude towards the universe. This was in my thoughts entirely when I suggested to a man of old George's headstrong and undisciplined nature that he would do well to investigate the habits of a sober and industrious insect like the ant. He has led an improvident life, and I thought that as he neared his end, whatever would promote a philosophic cast of mind would inevitably benefit his declining years — "

"He doesn't like to be reminded that they are declining, doctor, that's the trouble," I returned, as I shook hands hurriedly, and went on down the gravelled walk between the oyster shells to the gate that opened, beyond the currant bushes, out into the street.

My readjustment of the doctor's affairs had occupied no small part of my working day, and it was even later than usual when I arrived at home, too tired to consider dressing for dinner. At the door old Esdras announced that Sally had already gone to dine with Bonny Marshall, and would go to the theatre afterwards.

"Was she alone, Esdras?"

"Naw, suh, Marse George he done come fur her en ca'ried her off."

"Well, I'll dine just as I am, and as soon as it's ready."

The house was empty and deserted without Sally. and the perfume of a mimosa tree, which floated in on the warm breeze as I entered the drawing-room, came to me like the sweet, vague scent of her hair and her gown. A dim light burned under a pink shade in one corner, and so quiet appeared the quaint old room, with its faded cashmere rugs and its tapestried furniture, that the eyes of the painted Blands and Fairfaxes seemed alive as they looked down on me from the high white walls. From his wire cage, shrouded in a silk cover, the new canary piped a single enquiring note as he heard my step.

I dined alone, waited on in a paternal, though condescending, manner by old Esdras, and when I had finished my coffee I sat for a few minutes with a cigar on the porch, where the branches of the mimosa tree in

full bloom drooped over the white railing. While I sat there, I thought drowsily of many things — of the various financial schemes in which I was now involved; of the big railroad deal which I had refused to shirk and which meant possible millions; of the fact that the General was rapidly aging, and had already spoken of resigning the presidency of the Great South Midland and Atlantic. Then there flashed before me suddenly, in the midst of my business reflections, the look with which Sally had regarded me that morning while she lay, in her blue satin jacket, on the embroidered pillows.

"How alike all the Blands are," I thought sleepily, as I threw the end of my cigar out into the garden and rose to go upstairs to bed; "I never noticed until of late how much Sally is growing to resemble her Aunt Matoaca."

At midnight, after two hours' restless sleep, I awoke to find her standing before the bureau, in a gown of silver gauze, which gave her an illusive appearance of being clothed in moonlight. When I called her, and she turned and came toward me, I saw that there was a brilliant, unnatural look in her face, as though she had been dancing wildly or were in a fever. And this brilliancy seemed only to accentuate the sharpened lines of her features, with their suggestion of delicacy, of a too transparent fineness.

"You were asleep, Ben. I am sorry I waked you," she said.

"What is the matter, you are so flushed?" I asked.

"It was very warm in the theatre. I shan't go again until autumn."

"I don't believe you are well, dear. Isn't it time for you to get out of the city?"

Her arms were raised to unfasten the pearl necklace at her throat, and while I watched her face in the mirror, I saw that the flush suddenly left it and it grew deadly white.

"It's that queer pain in my back," she said, sinking into a chair, and hiding her eyes in her hands. "It comes on like this without warning. I've had it ever — ever since that year on Church Hill."

In an instant I was beside her, catching her in my arms as she swayed toward me.

"What can I do for you, dearest? Shall I get you a glass of wine?"

"No, it goes just as it comes," she answered, letting her hands fall from her face, and looking at me with a smile. "There, I'm better now, but I think you're right. I need to go out of the city. Even if I were to stay here," she added, "you would be almost always away."

"Go North with Bonny Marshall, as she suggested, and I'll join you for two weeks in August."

Shrinking gently out of my arms, she sat with the unfastened bodice of her gown slipping away from her shoulders, and her face bent over the pearl necklace which she was running back and forth through her fingers.

"Bonny and Ned and George all want me to go to Bar Harbor," she said, after a moment. Then she raised her eyes and looked at me with the expression of defiance, of recklessness, I had seen in them first on the afternoon when Beauchamp had thrown her. "If you want me to go, too, that will decide it."

"Of course I shall miss you, — I missed you this evening, — but I believe it's the thing for you."

"Then I'll go," she responded quietly, and turning away, as if the conversation were over, she went into her dressing-room to do her hair for the night.

Two weeks later she went, and during her absence the long hot summer dragged slowly by while I plunged deeper and deeper into the whirlpool of affairs. In August I made an effort to spend the promised two weeks with her, but on the third day of my visit, I was summoned home by a telegram; and once back in the city, the General's rapidly failing health kept me close as a prisoner at his side. When October came and I met her at the station, I noticed, with my first glance, that the look of excitement, of strained and unnatural brilliancy, had returned to her appearance. Some inward flame, burning steadily at a white heat, shone in her eyes and in her altered, transparent features.

"It's good to have you back again, heaven knows," I remarked, as we drove up the street between the scattered trees in their changing October foliage. "The house has been like a prison."

For the first time since she had stepped from the train, she leaned nearer and looked at me attentively, as if she were trying to recall some detail to her memory.

"You're different, Ben," she said; "you look so — so careless."

Her tone was gentle, yet it fell on my ears with a curious detachment, a remoteness, as if in thought, at least, she were standing off somewhere in an unapproachable place.

"I've had nobody to keep me up and I've grown seedy," I replied, trying to speak with lightness. "Now I'll begin grooming again, but all the same, I've made a pretty pile of money for you this summer."

"Oh, money!" she returned indifferently, "I've heard nothing but money since I went away. Is there a spot on earth, I wonder, where in this age they worship another God?"

"I know one person who doesn't worship it, and that's Dr. Theophilus."

She laughed softly.

"Well, the doctor and I will have to set up a little altar of our own."

For the first month after her return, I hoped that she had come back to a quieter and a more healthful life; but with the beginning of the winter season, she resumed the ceaseless rush of gaiety in which she had lived for the last two years. She was rarely at home now in the evenings; I came up always too tired or too busy to go out with her, and after dining alone, without dressing, I would hurry into my study for an hour's work with Bradley, or more often doze for a while before the cedar logs, with a cigar in my hand. On the few occasions when she remained at home, our conversation languished feebly because the one subject which engrossed my thoughts was received by her with candid, if smiling, scorn.

"I sometimes wish, Ben," she remarked one evening while we sat by the hearth for a few minutes before going upstairs, "that you'd begin to learn Johnson's Dictionary again. I'm sure it's more interesting than stocks."

The red light of the flames shone on her exquisite fineness, on that "look of the Blands," which lent its peculiar distinction, its suggestion of the "something else," to her delicate features and to her long slender figure, which had grown a little too thin. Between her and myself, divided as we were merely by the space of the fireside, I felt suddenly that there stretched both a mental and a physical distance; and this sense of unlikeness, — which I had become aware of for the first time, when she stepped from the train that October morning, between Bonny and George, — grew upon me until I could no longer tell whether it was my pride or my affection that suffered. I had grown careless, I knew, of "the little things" that she prized, while I so passionately pursued the big ones to which she appeared still indifferent. Meeting my image in one of the old gilt-framed mirrors between the windows, I saw that my features had taken the settled and preoccupied look of the typical man of affairs, that my figure, needing the exercise I had had no time for of late, had grown already unelastic and heavy. Had she noticed, I wondered, that the "magnificent animal" was losing his hold? Only that afternoon I had heard her laughing with George over some trivial jest which they had not explained; and this very laughter, because I did not understand it, had seemed, in some subtle way, to draw them to each other and farther from me. Yet she was mine, not George's, and the gloss on her hair, the scent of her gown, the pearls at her throat, were all the things that my money had given her.

"I've got terribly one-ideaed, Sally, I know," I said, answering her remark after a long silence; "but some

day, in a year or two perhaps, when I'm stronger, more successful, I'll cut it all for a time, and we'll go to Europe together. We'll have our second honeymoon as soon as I can get away."

"Remember I've a reception Thursday night, please, Ben," she responded, brushing my sentimental suggestion lightly aside.

"By Jove, I'm awfully sorry, but I've arranged to meet a man in New York on Wednesday. I simply had to do it. There was no way out of it."

"Then you won't be here?"

"I'll make a desperate effort to get back on the seven o'clock train from Washington. That will be in time?"

"Yes, that will be in time. You are in New York and Washington two-thirds of the month now."

"It's a beastly shame, too, but it won't last."

With a smothered yawn, she rose from her chair, and went over to the canary cage, raising the silk cover, while she put her lips to the wires and piped softly.

"Dicky is fast asleep," she remarked, turning away, "and you, Ben, are nodding. How dull the evenings are when one has nothing to do."

The next day I went to New York, and leaving Washington on Thursday afternoon, I had expected to reach Richmond in time to appear at Sally's reception by nine o'clock that evening. But a wreck on the road caused the train to be held back for several hours, and it was already late when I jumped from the cab at my door, and hurried under the awning across the pavement. The sound of stringed instruments playing softly reached me as it had done so many years ago

on the night when I first crossed the threshold; and a minute afterwards, when I went hastily up the staircase, in its covering of white, and its festoons of smilax, pretty girls made way for me, with laughing reprimands on their lips. Dressing as quickly as I could, I came down again and met the same rebukes from the same charming and smiling faces.

"You are really the most outrageous man I know," observed Bonny Marshall, stopping me at the foot of the staircase. "Poor Sally has been so awfully worried that she hasn't any colour, and I've advised her simply to engage George as permanent proxy. He is taking your place this evening quite charmingly."

The splendour of her appearance, rather than the severity of her words, held me bound and speechless. She was the most beautiful woman, it was generally admitted, in all Virginia, and in her spangled gown, which fell away from her superb shoulders, there was something brilliant and barbaric about her that went like strong wine to the head. A minute later she passed on, surrounded by former discarded lovers; and before entering the drawing-room — where Sally was standing between George Bolingbroke and a man whom I did not know — I paused behind a tub of flowering azalea, and watched the brightly coloured gowns of the women as they flitted back and forth over the shining floor. It was a year since I had been out even to dine, and while I stood there, the music, the lights, and the gaily dressed, laughing women produced in me the old boyish consciousness of the disadvantage of my size, of my awkwardness, of my increasing weight. I remembered suddenly the figure of President as he had loomed on

the night of our first dinner party between the feathery palm branches in the brilliantly lighted hall; and a sense of kinship with my own family, with my own past, awoke not in my thoughts, but in my body. Across the threshold, only a few steps away, I could see Sally receiving her guests in her gracious Fairfax manner, with George and the man whom I did not know at her side; and whenever George turned and spoke, as he did always at the right instant, I was struck by the perfect agreement, the fitness, in their appearance. These things that she valued — these adornments of the outside of existence — were not in my power to bestow except when they could be bought with money. How large, how heavy, I should have appeared there in George's place, which was mine. For the first time in my life a contempt for mere wealth, and for the position which the amassment of wealth confers, entered my heart. In seeking to give money had I, in reality, sacrificed the ability to give the things that she valued far more? Surrounded by the flowers and the lights and the music of the stringed instruments, I saw her in my memory framed in the long window of our bedroom on Church Hill, with the dim grey garden behind her, and the breeze, fragrant with jessamine, blowing the thin folds of her gown. Some clairvoyant insight, purchased, not by success, but by the suffering of those months, opened my eyes. What I had lost, I saw now, was Sally herself — not the outward woman, but the inner spirit, the fineness of sympathy, the quickness of understanding. The things that she could have taught me were the finer beauties of life — and these I had scorned to learn because they could not be grasped in

the hands. The objective, the external, was what I had worshipped, and our real division had come, not from the accident of our different beginnings, but from the choice that had committed us to opposite ends.

Some of the guests I knew, and these spoke to me as they passed; others I had never seen, and these walked by with level abstracted eyes fixed on the little group surrounding Sally and George. It was not only Sally's "set" — the older aristocratic circle — that was represented, I knew, for in the throng I recognised many of "the new people" — of the "mushrooms," of whom Bonny's grandmama had spoken with scorn. Once George turned and came toward the doorway, and the General, starting somewhere from a corner, observed in his loud hilarious voice, "I don't know what kind of husband you'd have made, George, but, by Jove, you do mighty well as a 'hanger-on'!"

What George's response was I could not hear, but from the dark flushed look of his features, I judged that he had not received the attack with his accustomed amiability. Then, as he was about to pass into the hall, his eyes fell on me, standing behind the tub of azalea, and a low whistle of surprise broke from his lips.

"So here you are, Ben! We'd given you up at least three hours ago."

"There was a wreck, and the train was delayed."

"Well, come in and do your duty, or what remains of it. It's no fun acting host in another man's house, when you don't know where he keeps his cigars. Sally, Ben's turned up, after all, at the last minute, when the hard work is over."

Crossing the threshold, I joined the little group,

shaking hands here and there, while Sally made running comments in a voice that sounded hopelessly animated and cheerful. She was looking very pale, there were dark violet circles under her eyes, and her gown of some faint sea-green shade brought out the delicate sharpened lines of her face and throat. The flame, which had burnt so steadily for the last year, seemed to die out slowly, in a waning flicker, while she stood there.

George, pushing me aside, came back with a glass of wine and a biscuit.

"Drink this, Sally," he said. "No, don't shake your head, drink it."

She held out her hand for the glass, but after she had taken it from him, before she could raise it to her lips, a tremor of anguish that was almost like a convulsion passed into her face. The glass fell from her hand, and the wine, splashing over her gown, stained it in a red streak from bosom to hem. Her figure swayed slightly, but when I reached out my arms to catch her, she gazed straight beyond me, with eyes which had grown wide and bright from some physical pain.

"George!" she said, "George!" and the name as she uttered it was an appeal for help.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE BLOW THAT CLEARS

Until dawn the doctor was with her, but in the afternoon, when I went into her room, I found that she had got out of bed and was dressed for motoring.

"Oh, I'm all right. There's nothing the matter with me except that I am smothering for fresh air," she said almost irritably, in reply to my remonstrances.

"But you are ill, Sally. You are as pale as a ghost."

She shook her head impatiently, and I noticed that the furs she wore seemed to drag down her slender figure.

"The wind will bring back my colour. If I lie there and think all day, I shall go out of my mind." Her lips trembled and a quiver passed through her face, but when I made a step toward her, she repulsed me with a gesture which, gentle as it was, appeared to place me at a measured distance. "I wish — oh, I wish Aunt Euphronasia wasn't dead," she said in a whisper.

"If you go, may I go with you?" I asked.

For a minute she hesitated, then meeting my eyes with a glance in which I read for the first time since I had known her, a gentle aversion, a faint hostility, she answered quietly: —

"I am sorry, but I've just telephoned Bonny that I'd call for her."

The old bruise in my heart throbbed while I turned away; but the pain instead of melting my pride, only increased the terrible reticence which I wore now as an armour. Her face, above the heavy furs that seemed dragging her down, had in it something of the soft, uncompromising obstinacy of Miss Matoaca. So delicate she appeared that I could almost have broken her body in my grasp; yet I knew that she would not yield though I brought the full strength of my will to bear in the struggle. In the old days, doubtless, Matoaca Bland, then in her pride and beauty, had faced the General with this same firmness which was as soft as velvet yet as inflexible as steel.

A few days after this, the great man, who had grown at last too feeble for an active part in "affairs," resigned the presidency of the South Midland, and retired, as he said, "to enjoy his second childhood."

"It's about time for Theophilus to bring around his box of ants, I reckon," he observed, and added seriously after a moment, "Yes, there's no use trying to prop up a fallen tree, Ben. I've had a long life and a good life, and I am willing to draw out. It's a losing game any way you play it, when it comes to that. I've thought a lot about it, my boy, these last weeks, and I tell you the only thing that sticks by you to the last is the love of a woman. If you need a woman when you are young, you need her ten thousand times more when you're old. If Miss Matoaca had married me, we'd both of us have been a long ways better off."

That night I told Sally of the resignation, and re-

peated to her a part of the conversation. The sentimental allusion to Miss Matoaca she treated with scorn, but after a few thoughtful moments she said:—

"You've always wanted to be president of the South Midland more than anything in the world?"

"More than anything in the world," I admitted absently.

"There's a chance now?"

"Yes, I suppose there's a chance now."

She said nothing more, but the next morning as I was getting into my overcoat, she sent me word that she wished to speak to me again before I went out.

"I'll be up in a minute," I answered, and I had turned to follow the maid up the staircase, when a sharp ring at the telephone distracted my attention.

"Come down in five minutes if you can," said a voice. "You're wanted badly about the B. and R. deal."

"Is your mistress ill?" I enquired, turning from the telephone to take up my overcoat.

"I think not, sir," replied the woman, "she is dressing."

"Then tell her I'm called away, but I will see her at luncheon," I answered hurriedly, as I rushed out.

Upon reaching my office, I found that my presence was required in Washington before two o'clock, and as I had not time to return home, I telephoned Sally for my bag, which she sent down to the station by Micah, the coachman.

"I hope to return early to-morrow," I said to the negro from the platform, as the train pulled out.

In my anxiety over the possible collapse of the important B. and R. deal, the message that Sally had

sent me that morning was crowded for several hours out of my thoughts. When I remembered it later in the afternoon, I sent her a telegram explaining my absence; and my conscience, which had troubled me for a moment, was appeased by this attention that would prove to her that even in the midst of my business worries I had not forgotten her. There was, indeed, I assured myself, no cause for the sudden throb of anxiety, almost of apprehension, I had felt at the recollection of the message that I had disregarded. She had looked stronger yesterday; I had commented at dinner on the fine flush in her cheeks; and the pain, which had caused me such sharp distress while it lasted, had vanished entirely for the last thirty-six hours. Then the sound of her voice, with its note of appeal, of helplessness, of terror, when she had called upon George at the reception, returned to me as if it were spoken audibly somewhere in my brain. I saw her eyes, wide and bright, as they had been when they looked straight beyond me in search of help, and her slender, swaying figure in its gown of a pale sea-foam shade that was stained from bosom to hem with the red streak of the wine. "Yet there is nothing to worry about," I thought, annoyed because I could not put this anxiety, this apprehension, out of my mind. "She is not ill. She is better. Only last night I heard her laughing as she has not done for weeks."

The afternoon was crowded with meetings, and it was three o'clock the next day when I reached home and asked eagerly for Sally as I went up the staircase. She had gone out, her maid informed me, but I would find a note she had left on my desk in the library.

Turning hastily back, I took up the note from the silver blotter beneath which it was lying, and as I opened it, I saw that the address looked tremulous and uncertain, as if it had been written in haste or excitement.

"Dear Ben (it read), I have been in trouble, and as I do not wish to disturb you at this time, I am going away for a few days to think it over. I shall be at Riverview, the old place on James River where mamma and I used to stay — but go ahead with the South Midland, and don't worry about me, it is all right.

"SALLY."

"I have been in trouble," I repeated slowly. "What trouble, and why should she keep it from me? Oh, because of the presidency of the South Midland! Damn the South Midland!" I said suddenly aloud. A time-table was on my desk, and looking into it, I found that a train left for Riverview in half an hour. I rang the bell and old Esdras appeared to announce luncheon.

"I want nothing to eat. Bring me a cup of coffee. I must catch a train in a few minutes."

"Fur de Lawd's sake, Marse Ben," exclaimed the old negro, "you ain' never gwineter res' at home agin."

Still grumbling he brought the coffee, and I was standing by the desk with the cup raised to my lips, when the front door opened and shut sharply, and the General came into the room, leaning upon two gold-headed walking-sticks. He looked old and tired, and more than ever, in his fur-lined overcoat, like a wounded eagle.

"Ben," he said, "what's this Hatty tells me about

George taking Sally out motoring with him yesterday, and not bringing her back? Has there been an accident?"

My arteries drummed in my ears, and for a minute the noise shut out all other sounds. Then I heard a carriage roll by in the street, and the faint regular ticking of the small clock on the mantel.

"Sally is at Riverview," I answered, "I am going down to her on the next train."

"Then where in the devil is George? He went off with her."

"George may be there, too. I hope he is. She needs somebody with her."

A purple flush rose to the General's face, and the expression in his small, watery grey eyes held me speechless.

"Confound you, Ben!" he exclaimed, in a burst of temper, "do you mean to tell me you don't know that George's blamed foolishness is the talk of the town? Why, he hasn't let Sally out of his sight for the last two years."

"No, I didn't know it," I replied.

"Great Scott! Where are your wits?"

"In the stock market," I answered bitterly. Then something in me, out of the chaos and the darkness, rose suddenly, as if with wings, into the light. "Of course Sally is an angel, General, we both know that — but how she could have helped seeing that George is the better man of us, I don't for a minute pretend to understand."

"Well, I never had much opinion of George," responded the General. "It always seemed to me that

he ought to have made a great deal more of himself than he has done."

"What he has made of himself," I answered, and my voice sounded harsh in my ears, "is the man that Sally ought to have married."

I went out hurriedly, forgetting to assist him, and limping painfully, he followed me to the porch, and called after me as I ran down into the street. Looking back, as I turned the corner, I saw him getting with difficulty into his buggy, which waited beside the curbing, and it seemed to me that his great bulky figure, in his fur-lined overcoat, was unreal and intangible like the images that one sees in sleep.

The train was about to pull out as I entered the station, and swinging on to the rear coach, I settled myself into the first chair I came to, which happened to be directly behind the shining bald head and red neck of a man I knew. As I shrank back, he turned, caught sight of me, and held out his hand with an easy air of good-fellowship.

"So General Bolingbroke has retired from the South Midland and Atlantic Railroad, I hear," he remarked. "Well, there's a big job waiting for somebody, but he'll have to be a big man to fit it."

A sudden ridiculous annoyance took possession of me; the General, the South Midland Railroad, and the bald-headed man before me, all appeared to enter my consciousness like small, stinging gnats that swarmed about larger bodies. What was the railroad to me, if I had lost Sally? Had I lost her? Was it possible to win her again? "I am in trouble," the words whirled in my thoughts, "and as I do not wish to dis-

turb you at this time, I have gone off for a few days to think it over." Was the trouble associated with George Bolingbroke? Did she mind the gossip? Did she think I should mind it? Whatever it was, why didn't she come to me and weep it out on my breast? "I didn't want to disturb you at this time." At this time? That was because of the South Midland and Atlantic Railroad. "Damn the South Midland and Atlantic Railroad!" I said again under my breath.

The red neck of the bald-headed man in front of me suddenly turned.

"Going down for a little hunting?" he enquired genially, "there isn't much else, I reckon, to take a man like you down into this half-baked country. I hear the partridges are getting scarce, and they are going to bring a bill into the Legislature forbidding the sending of them outside of the state. Now, that's a direct slap, I say, at the small farmer. A bird is a bird, ain't it, even if it's a Virginia partridge?"

I rose and took up my overcoat. "I'll go into the smoking-car. They keep it too hot here."

He nodded cheerfully. "I was in there myself, but it's like an oven, too, so I came out." Then he unfolded his newspaper, and I passed hurriedly down the aisle of the coach.

In the smoking-car the air was like the fumes in the stemming room of a tobacco factory, but lighting a cigar, I leaned back on one of the hard, plush-covered seats, and stared out at the low, pale landscape beyond the window. It was late November, and the sombre colours of the fields and of the leafless trees showed through a fine autumnal mist, which lent an atmosphere

of melancholy to the stretches of fallow land, to the harvested corn-fields, in which the stubble stood in rows, like a headless army, and to the long red-clay road winding, deep in mud, to the distant horizon.

"I am in trouble — I am in trouble," I heard always above the roar of the train, above the shrill whistle of the engine, as it rounded a curve, above the thin, drawling voices of my fellow-passengers, disputing a question in politics. "I am in trouble," ran the words. "What trouble? What trouble? What trouble?" I repeated passionately, while my teeth bit into my cigar, and the flame went out. "So George hasn't let her out of his sight for two years, and I did not know it. For two years! And in these two years how much have I seen of her — of Sally, my wife? We have been living separate lives under the same roof, and when she asked me for bread, I have given her — pearls!" A passion of remorse gripped me at the throat like the spring of a beast. Pearls for bread, and that to Sally — to my wife, whom I loved! The melancholy landscape at which I looked appeared to divide and dissolve, and she came back to me, not as I had last seen her, weighed down by the furs which were too heavy, but in her blue gingham apron with the jagged burn on her wrist, and the patient, divine smile hovering about her lips. If she went from me now, it would be always the Sally of that year of poverty, of suffering, that I had lost. In the future she would haunt me, not in her sea-green gown, with the jewels on her bosom, but in her gingham apron with the sleeves rolled back from her reddened arms and the jagged scar from the burn disfiguring her flesh.

"I'll see him in hell, before I'll vote for him!" called out a voice at my back, in a rage.

The train pulled into the little wayside station of Riverview, and getting out, I started on the walk of two miles through the flat, brown fields to the house. The road was heavy with mud, and it was like ploughing to keep straight on in the single red-clay furrow which the wheels of passing wagons had left. All was desolate, all was deserted, and the only living things I saw between the station and the house were a few lonely sheep browsing beside a stream, and the brown-winged birds that flew, with wet plumage, across the road.

When I reached the ruined gateway of Riverview, the old estate of the Blands', I quickened my pace, and went rapidly up the long drive to the front of the house, where I saw the glimmer of red firelight on the ivied window-panes in the west wing. As I ascended the steps, there was a sound on the gravel, and George Bolingbroke came around the corner of the house, in hunting clothes, with a setter dog at his heels.

"Hello, Ben!" he remarked, half angrily. "So you've turned up, have you? Has there been another panic in the market?"

"Is Sally here?" I asked. "I'm anxious about her."

"Well, it's time you were," he answered. "Yes, she's inside."

He stopped in the centre of the walk, and turning from the door, I came back and faced him in a silence that seemed alive with the beating of innumerable wings in the air.

"Something's wrong, George," I said at last, breaking through my restraint.

He looked at me with a calm, enquiring gaze while I was speaking, and by that look I understood, in an inspiration, he had condemned me.

"Yes, something's wrong," he answered quietly, "but have you just found it out?"

"I haven't found it out yet. What is it? What is the matter?"

At the question his calmness deserted him and the dark flush of anger broke suddenly in his face.

"The matter is, Ben," he replied, holding himself in with an effort, "that you've missed being a fool only by being a genius instead."

Then turning away, as if his temper had got the better of him, he strode back through a clump of trees on the lawn, while I went up the steps again, and crossing the cold hall, entered the dismantled drawing-room, where a bright log fire was burning.

Sally was sitting on the hearth, half hidden by the high arms of the chair, and as I closed the door behind me, she rose and stood looking at me with an expression of surprise. So had Miss Mitty and Miss Matoaca looked in the firelight on that November afternoon when Sally and I had gone in together.

"Why, Ben!" she said quietly, "I thought you were in Washington!"

"I got home this morning and found your note. Sally, what is the trouble?"

"You came after me?"

"I came after you. The General went wild and

imagined that there had been an accident, or George had run off with you."

"Then the General sent you?"

"Nobody sent me. I was leaving the house when he found me."

She had not moved toward me, and for some reason, I still stood where I had stopped short in the centre of the room, kept back by the reserve, the detachment in her expression.

"You came believing that George and I had gone off together?" she asked, and there was a faint hostility in her voice.

"Of course I didn't believe it. I'm not a fool if I am an ass. But if I had believed it," I added passionately, "it would have made no difference. I'd have come after you if you'd gone off with twenty Georges."

"Well, there's only one," she said, "and I did go off with him."

"It makes no difference."

"We left Richmond at ten o'clock yesterday, and we've been here ever since."

"What does that matter?"

"You mean it doesn't matter that I came away with George and spent twenty-four hours?"

"I mean that nothing matters — not if you'd spent twenty-four years."

"I suppose it doesn't," she responded quietly, and there was a curious remoteness, a hollowness in the sound of the words. "When one comes to see things as they are, nothing really matters. It is all just the same."

Her face looked unsubstantial and wan in the firelight, and so ethereal, so neshless, appeared her figure, that it seemed to me I could see through it to the shining of the flames before which she stood.

"I can't talk, Sally," I said, "I am not good at words, I believe I'm more than half a fool as George has just told me — but — but — I want you — I've always wanted you — I've never in my heart wanted anything in the world but you —"

"I don't suppose even that matters much," she answered wearily, "but if you care to know, Ben, George and Bonny found me when I was alone and — and very unhappy, and they brought me with them when they came down to hunt. They are hunting now."

"You were alone and unhappy?" I said, for George Bolingbroke and Bonny Marshall had faded from me into the region of utterly indifferent things.

"It was that I wanted to tell you the morning you couldn't wait," she returned gently; "I had kept it from you the night before because I saw that you were so tired and needed sleep. But — but I had seen two doctors, both had told me that I was ill, that I had some trouble of the spine, that I might be an invalid — a useless invalid, if I lived, that — that there would never be another child — that —"

Her voice faltered and ceased, for crossing the room with a bound, I had gathered her to my breast, and was bending over her in an intensity, a violence of love, crushing back her hands on her bosom, while I kissed her face, her throat, her hair, her dress even, as I had never kissed her in the early days of our

marriage. The passion of happiness in that radiant prime was pale and bloodless beside the passion of sorrow which shook me now.

"Stop, stop, Ben," she said, struggling to be free, "let me go. You are hurting me."

"I shall never stop, I shall never let you go," I answered, "I shall hold you forever, even if it hurts you."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE ULTIMATE CHOICE

We carried her home next day in George's motor car, ploughing with difficulty over the heavy roads, which in a month's time would have become impassable. A golden morning had followed the rain; the sun shone clear, the wind sang in the bronzed tree-tops, and on the low hills to the right of us, the harvested corn ricks stood out illuminated against a deep blue sky. When the brown-winged birds flew, as they sometimes did, across the road, her eyes measured their flight with a look in which there was none of the radiant impulse I had seen on that afternoon when she gazed after the flying swallows. She spoke but seldom, and then it was merely to thank me when I wrapped the fur rug about her, or to reply to a question of George's with a smile that had in it a touching helplessness, a pathetic courage. And this helplessness, this courage, brought to my memory the sound of her voice when she had called George's name aloud in her terror. Even after we had reached home, and when she and I stood alone, for a minute, before the fire in her room, I felt still that something within her — something immaterial and flamelike that was her soul — turned from me, seeking always a clearer and a diviner air.

"Are you in pain now, Sally? What can I do for you?" I asked.

"No, I am better. Don't worry," she answered.

Then, because there seemed nothing further to say, I stood in silence, while she moved from me, as if the burden of her weight was too much for her, and sank down on the couch, hiding her face in the pillows.

Two days later there came down a great specialist from New York for a consultation; and while he was upstairs in her closed bedroom, I walked up and down the floor of the library, over the Turkish rugs, between the black oak bookcases, as I had walked in that other house on the night of my failure. How small a thing that seemed to me now compared with this! What I remembered best from that night was the look in her face when she had turned and run back to me with her arms outstretched, and the warm, flattened braid of her hair that had brushed my cheek. I understood at last, as I walked restlessly back and forth, waiting for the verdict from the closed room, that I had been happy then — if I had only known it! The warmth stifled me, and going to the window, I flung it open, and leaned out into the mild November weather. In the street below leaves were burning, and while the odour floated up to me I saw again her red shoes dancing over the sunken graves in the churchyard.

The door opened above, there was the sound of a slow heavy tread on the staircase, and I went forward to meet the great specialist as he came into the room.

For a minute he looked at me enquiringly over a

pair of black-rimmed glasses, while I stood there neither thinking nor feeling, but waiting. Something in my brain, which until then had seemed to tick the slow movement of time, came suddenly to a stop like a clock that has run down.

"In my opinion an operation is unnecessary, Mr. Starr," he said, drawing out his watch as he spoke, "and in your wife's present condition I seriously advise against it. The injury to the spine may not be permanent, but there is only one cure for it — time — time and rest. To make recovery possible she should have absolute quiet, absolute freedom from care. She must be taken to a milder climate, — I would suggest southern California, — and she must be kept free from mental disturbance for a number of years."

"In that case there is hope of recovery?"

For an instant he stared at me blankly, his gaze wandering from his watch to the clock on the mantel, as if there were a discrepancy in the time, which he would like to correct.

"Ah, yes, hope," he replied suddenly, in a cheerful voice, "there is always hope." Then having uttered his confession of faith, he appeared to grow nervous. "Have you a time-table on your desk?" he enquired. "I'd like to look up an earlier train than the Florida special."

Having looked up his train, he turned to shake hands with me, while the abstracted and preoccupied expression in his face grew a trifle more human, as if he had found what he wanted.

"What your wife needs, my dear sir," he remarked,

as he went out, "is not medical treatment, but daily and hourly care."

A minute later, when the front door had closed after him, and the motor car had borne him on his way to the station, I stood alone in the room, repeating his words with a kind of joy, as if they contained the secret of happiness for which I had sought. "Daily and hourly care, daily and hourly care." I tried to think clearly of what it meant — of the love, the sacrifice, the service that would go into it. I tried, too, to think of her as she was lying now, still and pale in the room upstairs, with the expression of touching helplessness, of pathetic courage, about her mouth; but even as I made the effort, the scent of burning leaves floated again through the window and I could see her only in her red shoes dancing over the sunken graves. "Daily and hourly care," I repeated aloud.

The words were still on my lips when old Esdras, stepping softly, came in and put a telegram into my hands, and as I tore it open, I said over slowly, like one who impresses a fact on the memory, "What your wife needs is daily and hourly care." Ah, she should have it. How she should have it! Then my eyes fell on the paper, and before I read the words, I knew that it was the offer of the presidency of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad. The end of my ambition, the great adventure of my boyhood, lay in my grasp.

With the telegram still in my hand, I went up the staircase, and entered the bedroom where Sally was lying, with wide, bright eyes, in the dimness.

"It's good news," I said, as I bent over her, "there's only good news to-day."

She looked up at me with that searching brightness I had seen when she gazed straight beyond me for the help that I could not give.

"It means going away from everything I have ever known," she said slowly; "it means leaving you, Ben."

"It means never leaving me again in your life," I replied; "not for a day — not for an hour."

"You will go, too?" she asked, and the faint wonder in her face pierced to my heart.

"Do you think I'd be left?" I demanded.

Her eyes filled and as she turned from me, a tear fell on my hand.

"But your work, your career — oh, no, no, Ben, no."

"You are my career, darling, I have never in my heart had any career but you. What I am, I am yours, Sally, but there are things that I cannot give you because they are not mine, because they are not in me. These are the things that were George's."

Lifting my hand she kissed it gently and let it fall with a gesture that expressed an acquiescence in life rather than a surrender to love.

"I've sometimes thought that if I hadn't loved you first, Ben — if I could ever have changed, I should have loved George," she said, and added very softly, like one who seeks to draw strength from a radiant memory, "but I had already loved you once for all, I suppose, in the beginning."

"I am yours, such as I am," I returned. "Plain I

shall always be — plain and rough sometimes, and forgetful to the end of the little things — but the big things are there as you know, Sally, as you know."

"As I know," she repeated, a little sadly, yet with the pathetic courage in her voice; "and it is the big things, after all, that I've wanted most all my life."

Then she shook her head with a smile that brought me to my knees at her side.

"You've forgotten the railroad," she said. "You've forgotten the presidency of the South Midland — that's what *you* wanted most."

My laugh answered her. "Hang the presidency of the South Midland!" I responded gaily.

Her brows went up, and she looked at me with the shadow of her old charming archness. By this look I knew that the spirit of the Blands would fight on, though always with that faint wonder. Then her eyes fell on the crumpled telegram I still held in my hand, and she reached to take it.

"What is that, dear?" she asked.

Breaking away from her, I walked to the fireplace and tossed the offer of the presidency of the South Midland and Atlantic Railroad into the grate. It caught slowly, and I stood there while it flamed up, and then crumbled with curled fiery ends among the ashes. When it was quite gone, I turned and came back to her.

"Only a bit of waste paper," I answered.

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